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SIR WALTER SCOTT'S  
CONGÉ



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*C.H. Jeens*

LADY FORBES OF PITSLIGO  
(Williamina Belsches)



SIR  
WALTER SCOTT'S  
CONGÉ

BY  
THE HON. LORD SANDS, D.D., LL.D.  
*Senator of the College of Justice in Scotland*

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## PREFACE

LOVE is the chief staple of romance. But the lover is not, like the fairy, a creation of the story-teller. Romance is but a reflection of a reality which is always with us. The love stories even of a single generation of men would fill all the books that ever were written. All important for the time being to the men and women they concern, they leave no record behind them: and 'tis well so.

But some love stories in real life are matters of public history. Over them no veil is or can be cast. Walter Scott's early love was not of this character. Why then seek to disinter it? Why not let it sleep where sleep countless other loves? The answer, or my apology, whichever way it may be regarded, is fourfold.

(1) Scott's love affair concerned his private life only, but there is a rank among the immortals where details of private life are of legitimate human interest, and to this rank Scott belongs. A shrewish, unsympathetic wife, a love affair terminated by early death—these are not rare experiences, but Xanthippe is immortal, and "Highland Mary" is of more interest to Scots than Brunhilda or Boadicea;

indeed to some, as it would almost seem, than Queen Margaret or Mary Stuart!

(2) Scott's legacy to the world, and particularly to his own countrymen, is a legacy not merely of literature but of character, and nothing that tends to illuminate that character need be concealed.

(3) Scott's romances are part of the permanent literature of the world, and his own personal experiences may throw some light upon the characters and the incidents in those romances.

(4) Love interests. Walter Scott interests. Walter Scott was a story-teller and his early love is an interesting story.

I fear, however, that I have already transgressed against the counsel of Scott himself contained in a letter published in Chapter IV. hereof. "Apologies for publication are in fact no apologies at all. Either the things are worthy of the attention of the public, or they are not. In the one case an apology would be superfluous, in the other impertinent; *sat est.*" Incidentally the publication to which Scott here refers—his earliest—was a complete failure. *Absit omen.*

All that throws light upon Sir Walter Scott has always had great interest for me. But I was led to take a special interest in his own personal romance by the acquisition of a letter by him to Erskine (afterwards Lord Kinnedder), which throws new light upon the matter and corrects Lockhart's story of the *dénouement*. For the outlines of the story we are



dependent almost entirely upon Lockhart. Doubtless the particulars were known at the time to some friends of Scott, but Scott was not then a contemporary celebrity, and the matter was not one of which to make any record at the time. When Lockhart, as the biographer of Scott, was called upon to give some account of the affair, he deemed himself obliged, for reasons of delicacy, to observe a certain reticence in regard to a matter which affected another family as well as Scott's own. Moreover, Lockhart's own information was probably somewhat scanty. The matter was not one to be discussed with Scott's family, and I think it not only doubtful but improbable that Scott ever directly referred to the affair in his intercourse with Lockhart. These considerations do not justify any refusal to accept Lockhart's account in so far as it does not run counter to authentic information. But, on the other hand, they explain the errors into which Lockhart fell, as can now be shown by contemporary correspondence. This leads straight to what is new in the present work in relation to the final shattering of Scott's hopes as regards Williamina Belsches. Lockhart's story is that Scott goes to pay a visit to a house in the north where he is to meet the lady, who gives him a cold reception. Scott then plunges frantically into the wilds of the Highlands, from which he shortly emerges, having "digested" his grief, to resume the tenor of his life—chastened, doubtless, but soon with renewed buoyancy. This

account of the matter is erroneous as is shown by the letter to Erskine printed, as I believe, for the first time, in Chapter IV.

There are three sets of letters which might have elucidated the whole story: (1) Scott's letters to Miss Belsches; (2) his letters to Miss Cranstoun; (3) his letters to Erskine (Lord Kinnedder). As regards the first, the late Sir William Robertson Nicoll, as I am told by the Rev. Dr. Crockett, stated that they were in the possession of the family. Enquiry was made by Dr. Crockett, and the result was entirely negative. (2) As is explained by Captain Basil Hall in his work *Schloss Hainfeld*, the letters to Miss Cranstoun disappeared through misadventure. (3) Scott's letters to Erskine were destroyed after the latter's death through a mistaken idea of confidentiality. Two of these letters, however,—both letters of great interest—here printed escaped this destruction.

As already indicated, the episode of the final rupture is the one in regard to which new material is available. The number of errors and puzzles in connection with this episode, as disclosed in these pages, is remarkable—

The misdated letter from Scott to Erskine,  
p. 53.

The misdated letter from Miss Erskine to Scott,  
p. 68.

Miss Erskine's reticence as to her own marriage,  
p. 51.

Lockhart's error in regard to Miss Cranstoun's letter, p. 56.

Lockhart's error in regard to Mr. Walker's letter, p. 58.

Lockhart's error apparently in regard to a visit to Fettercairn, p. 60.

Mitchell's error as to a circuit court, p. 66.

Scott's hurried journey to Kelso, pp. 62, 69.

The Dulcinea incident, p. 71.

The Don Guglielmo incident, p. 72.

In 1896 Mr. Adam Scott published a very charming work, *Walter Scott's First Love*, from which I have derived much assistance, and which I should be sorry to supersede. But the scope of that work is different from the present. It is rather of the nature of a discursive essay upon the accepted story than a critical examination of the facts.

Mr. Adam Scott follows Mr. David Douglas in his edition of Scott's Journal in the error of supposing that Williamina Belsches was of the Invermay family and that Invermay in Perthshire, not Fettercairn in Kincardineshire, was the scene of the break with Scott. As will appear, however, this is quite a mistake. True, Williamina's grandmother came from Invermay, which belonged to that lady's father, and in which he was succeeded by her half-brother, but Williamina's father, Sir John Belsches (afterwards Stuart), was the head of the senior or Tofts branch of the family. The Invermay legend has now wide currency and that mansion is often

pointed out as the scene of Scott's rejection. But Invermay had "nothing to do with the case" and I have found no evidence that Scott ever visited Invermay.

I desire to disclaim any pretence to finality as to what is discoverable in regard to the story. It may be that there are documents in existence which will clear up what I have found dark or correct me where I have erred. I shall be pleased if this publication leads any magpies to examine their hoards. Meantime the two letters to Erskine herein published appear to be the only authentic contemporary records throwing light upon the rupture and Scott's feelings at the time.

My thanks are due to the Lyon King for genealogical information, to Lord Clinton for the trouble he took to satisfy himself that there is no information in his family archives throwing light upon the matter, and more particularly to Mr. J. Robertson Christie, K.C., for kindly reading and revising the proof sheets.

CHRISTOPHER N. JOHNSTON  
(SANDS)



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# SIR WALTER SCOTT'S CONGÉ

## CHAPTER I

### THE TRIANGLE

#### (I) WALTER SCOTT AT TWENTY-FIVE

THE first side of the triangle needs no introduction or explanation. It seems to be the fate of eminent Scottish writers to live domestically much in the limelight: witness Burns, Carlyle, and Stevenson. Scott is no exception. As regards personal details few lives have been more thoroughly explored. As regards self-revelation, few have been more copious or more candid, and in Scott's case all with a simplicity and humility that stamps it as genuine.

Scott has himself told the story of his boyhood in the autobiographical fragment with which Lockhart began his "Life". He there carries the story down to the date of his admission to the bar in 1792. This was well within the period of his first love, but to this matter he makes no allusion. In 1808, when he wrote the autobiographical fragment, the lady of his first love was still alive and the wife of his friend.

The date when Walter Scott first made the acquaintance of Williamina Belsches is uncertain. The boy and girl attachment of tradition seems to overlook the fact that Scott, who was born in 1771, was five years the senior of Miss Belsches, who was born in 1776. At all events, if we are to reckon as Scott seemed to reckon when he spoke of three years of dreaming and two years of wakening, the matter, so far as he was concerned, did not assume a serious aspect until he was twenty-one; for his engagement to Miss Carpenter, which must have put a term to the awakening, took place in the autumn of 1797 when Scott was twenty-six. Memory as to dates, however, is treacherous, and there are slips both in Scott's and in Lockhart's accounts of matters. As a youth after he left school Scott was solitary, awkward and, as one may take it, untidy. In the *Journal* he remarks that the desire for solitude was strong upon him in early youth and "even when I was eighteen when love and ambition threw me more into society". This tallies very nearly with the account of Scott's friend William Clerk, for in 1790 Scott, whose birthday was 15th August, was 18-19.

It was about 1790, according to Mr. William Clerk, that Scott was observed to lay aside that carelessness as to dress which used to furnish subject matter for joking at the beginning of their acquaintance. He now did himself more justice in these matters, became fond of mixing in general female society, and, as his friend expresses it, began to set up as a squire of dames (Lockhart, i. 162).



The passage, however, does not convey the impression that at this time there was only one dame. Indeed, if Scott is right as to his having been eighteen when the change in his relations to society began to take place, Williamina Belsches was then only thirteen: and such an almost nursery acquaintance could hardly "throw" a lad "into society". I am disposed to think that Scott somewhat antedates, while Clerk's "about 1790" might cover 1791, when Scott was twenty and Williamina fifteen, a more plausible proposition.

The origin of the attachment will, however, be considered later. What one is here concerned with is Scott as he was during the culminating stages of the affair. Scott was admitted as a member of the Faculty of Advocates in 1792. Whatever may have been the state of the young lady's feelings, there is no doubt that by this time Scott was deeply smitten. The close of the courtship came four years later in the autumn of 1796. The following description of Scott's personal appearance in the days of his youthful bachelorhood is found in Lockhart (i. 162):

His personal appearance at this time was not unengaging. A lady of high rank, who well remembers him in the Old Assembly Rooms, says "Young Walter was a comely creature". He had outgrown the sallowness of early ill health, and had a fresh brilliant complexion. His eyes were clear, open, and well set, with a changeful radiance, to which teeth of the most perfect regularity and whiteness lent their assistance, while the noble expanse and elevation of the brow gave to the whole aspect a dignity far above the charm of mere features. His

smile was always delightful; and I can easily fancy the peculiar intermixture of tenderness and gravity, with playful innocent hilarity and humour in the expression, as being well calculated to fix a lady's eye. His figure, excepting the blemish in one limb, must in those days have been eminently handsome; tall, much above the usual standard, it was cast in the very mould of a young Hercules; the head set on with singular grace, the throat and chest after the truest model of the antique, the hands delicately finished; the whole outline that of extraordinary vigor, without as yet a touch of clumsiness. When he had acquired a little facility of manner, his conversation must have been such as could have dispensed with any exterior advantages, and certainly brought swift forgiveness for the one unkindness of nature.

The exterior was fair. So were the mind and spirit, as the record of a noble life and high achievement amply testify. But Scott at twenty-five was a side in a matrimonial triangle. What were the material recommendations of this side? What was his worldly situation? He had now been four years at the bar. For these four years the total amount of the fees he had earned was some 233 guineas (Lockhart, i. 265). There was nothing discreditable or even discouraging in this as things go at the bar; indeed, as he himself remarks, he had done as well as any of his contemporaries. But the future was uncertain. Scott had not been an immediate or striking success. One-third even of the meagre total had come from his father's office. His prospects of patrimony were small: he had no powerful family connections—a thing of far greater importance then than now. Moreover,

though not neglectful of his professional opportunities or indifferent to success at the bar, Scott had not laid himself out for the assiduous prosecution of professional work. His heart was hardly in it. His ample leisure was devoted, not to studies ancillary to his own profession, but to the study of history, folklore, antiquities, German, and romance. He was the centre of a coterie of somewhat convivially living bucks in the Parliament House, most of them with larger resources than his own, some of whom shared his tastes, whilst others were amused thereby, but all of whom loved and admired Scott. He was not, however, as some of the capers of the group with which he was associated might suggest, a man's man, indifferent to all female society save that of one. He had formed a close and confidential intimacy of a kind unusual in these days, though wholly unexceptionable, with at least two sprightly and accomplished young ladies—Miss Jane Ann Cranstoun, sister of his friend George Cranstoun (afterwards Lord Corehouse), and Miss Mary Anne Erskine, sister of his close companion William Erskine (afterwards Lord Kinnedder).

Such was Scott of twenty-five. Such the young Lochinvar who set out from Edinburgh for Kincardineshire in August 1796 to return headlong without, so far as this record discloses, the opportunity even

To tread but one measure,  
Drink one cup of wine.

Such was the first side of the triangle.

## WILLIAMINA BELSCHES

Williamina Belsches was the only daughter of Sir John Belsches, advocate, and his wife Lady Jane, daughter of David, Earl of Leven and Melville. The mother needs no explanation, for this is accessible in any "Peerage". But the history of the father's family is more difficult, and is not without its relevancy to the circumstances of the young lady whom Scott loved and lost.<sup>1</sup>

One knows not whether it has disappeared because it was so disagreeable; but the name of Belsches (or Belches, for it is sometimes so spelt and there are other variations) is now, so far as can be ascertained, unknown in Scotland and is not to be found in any directory. The disappearance of names once fairly familiar is sometimes ascribed to their having run out into female lines. But if this were a law generally operative, all names ought to disappear. There is nothing in a name to influence fertility in male births. But, whatever be the explanation, there is no doubt that certain names, once fairly common, have dropped out.

The oldest reference I have found to the name of Belsches is in certain charters of *circa* 1500, where reference is made to an ecclesiastic of that name, James Belchis, a canon of Dunblane. A Pre-Reforma-

<sup>1</sup> The lady is often referred to as Miss Williamina Stuart, but her father did not assume the name of Stuart until after her marriage, and she was married upon 17th Jan. 1797 as Williamina Wishart Belsches.



tion ecclesiastic, however, whatever may have been his pride of ancestry, had no hope of an honourable posterity and does not serve well as the starting-point of a pedigree. The first clearly authentic Belsches was John Belsches, an advocate of the beginning of the seventeenth century. He claims, or at all events the claim has been made for him, at the Lyon Office, to be the son of “—— Belsches of that Ilk”. The Ilk is said to have been in Roxburghshire and is identified with the village now known as Belses, near Ancrum. John Belsches appears to have been a successful forensic practitioner. His name occurs in a number of deeds. He acquired the estate of Tofts<sup>1</sup> in Berwickshire, which was erected into a barony in 1625. His son Alexander, also an advocate, achieved higher distinction, being knighted and appointed a Lord of Session, under the title of Lord Tofts. He first aggrandised the estates, but subsequently he greatly embarrassed them owing to engagements entered into on behalf of his patron, the Earl of Loudoun. Lord Tofts had no issue, and on his death in 1657 he was succeeded by his brother John. The succession to what was left of Tofts passed down to this John’s son, John Belsches, advocate, who married a Swinton, daughter of Lord Mersington, a Lord of Session. The eldest son of this marriage, Charles, dissipated what was left of the family property. But a change of fortune now set in. A younger brother, William, had rapidly acquired a considerable fortune in the East

<sup>1</sup> Now known as “Purves Hall”, Eccles Parish.

Indies and, on the death of Charles, succeeded, if not to any property, to the headship of the Tofts family. In 1742 he married his kinswoman, Amelia of the Invermay family, of whom more hereafter. In the following year he died, but he left an infant son, John, and this John was the father of Scott's Williamina.

It is necessary, however, in order to explain the family and their resources, to revert to Amelia of Invermay. Alexander, a younger son of that John of Tofts who was the brother of Lord Tofts, had acquired the estate of Invermay in Perthshire. His son John, who was admitted an advocate in 1720 and died in 1777, married Mary, daughter of Daniel Stuart. This was the source of the baronetcy and of the bulk of the fortune in Williamina Belsches' family. Daniel Stuart, who was one of the Commissioners for the Treaty of Union, and otherwise publicly prominent, married Margaret, the eldest daughter of Sir George Wishart of Cliftonhall, Ratho. Wishart was a colonel of the Scots Greys, and in 1706 he obtained from Queen Anne the grant of a baronetcy, carrying out a warrant granted by King William in 1700 but not effectually passed under the Seal before the death of that monarch. Baronetcies were usually granted with a destination to heirs male of the body of the grantee, but in this case George Wishart, having no sons, a peculiar destination was introduced, viz: to his "heirs whomsoever (which would include females) and their heirs male in perpetuity". The effect of this grant has been

treated as a puzzle, but the matter is too technical to be discussed here, and reference is made to the appendix. In any view, the baronetcy passed, through Margaret, the eldest daughter of Sir George Wishart and the wife of Daniel Stuart, to her son Sir William. This baronet seems to have been a peculiar person. He lived abroad, is said to have married a Venetian lady, and died in Paris without issue in 1777. Thereafter both the Wishart succession to the baronetcy and the Stuart succession to what appears to have been a very considerable fortune, devolved upon his niece Amelia, daughter of his deceased sister Mary, who had married John Belsches of Invermay, as above explained. This Amelia, who survived until 1807, was the mother of John Belsches, the father of Scott's Williamina. With the Stuart fortune she purchased the estate of Fettercairn in Kincardineshire. Upon the death of his uncle Sir William, John Belsches seems to have assumed the designation of baronet, for he so appears in Edinburgh Directories. It is confidently affirmed by the authorities upon baronetcies that his right to the Wishart baronetcy was recognised by the Lyon Office in 1797. There is no record of this, however, in the Lyon Office. The position is hardly intelligible. If a woman could hold a baronetcy, the baronet was the mother Amelia. If a woman could transmit but could not hold a baronetcy, then the right to it was in abeyance during her lifetime, for a living person can have no heir, and only her heir could take through her. Be this as

it may, John Belsches appears to have been recognised as the baronet. In 1798 he and his mother assumed, with Royal license, the name of Stuart, a requirement apparently under the will of his ancestor Daniel Stuart, which his mother Amelia is said to have insisted upon. Henceforward he is Sir John Stuart. To exhaust him before turning to his daughter. Sir John does not appear to have been a very actively practising advocate, though he held the position of Clerk to the admission of Notaries. For a number of years he was member for Kincardineshire. But in 1807 he was appointed a Baron of Exchequer, a lucrative but by no means onerous appointment. Somewhere in the 'nineties he appears to have given up his house in Edinburgh and, though he held a judicial office, his name does not afterwards appear as a householder in Edinburgh. He died in 1821, survived by his widow, Lady Jane, but predeceased by his daughter Williamina.

James Mill, when a student, was employed by Sir John both at Fettercairn and in Edinburgh, as tutor to his daughter Williamina, who was but three years Mill's junior, and a warm attachment to Mill seems to have been formed by Sir John, who did all that he could to advance his interests.

Mill's biographer, Professor Bain of Aberdeen, writes:

Sir John Stuart's steady attachment to James Mill entitles him to honourable remembrance. But it is not easy to find out what kind of man Sir John was. Few

people can give an account of him. He was not even honoured with a newspaper paragraph on his death. The popular tradition makes him out haughty and ill-tempered: but after hearing all that could be said in his own locality, I was led to the conclusion that he was a just-minded and really generous man; he could not bear to be thwarted. Lady Jane was revered for every virtue.

It will be obvious from the foregoing account of the Belsches family that Miss Williamina Belsches was a *parti*. She had some of the best blood of Scotland in her veins. She was the heiress to a large heritage. She carried with her the potency, if not of herself holding, at all events of transmitting, a baronetcy. Walter Scott cannot be blamed for diffidence in evening himself with her matrimonially, nor can her parents well be blamed if they regarded, not indeed Walter Scott, the great master of modern romance, but Walter Scott as they saw him, the bright and amiable but penniless and rather erratic son of a respectable Edinburgh scrivener as not a very suitable suitor for the hand of their daughter.

But what of Williamina herself, for after all she was the third side of that strange triangle, of which it is impossible to affirm that any two sides were greater than the third side? She is somewhat vague and ineffectual, but little blame to her. She married at the age of twenty, and died at the age of thirty-three, having borne six children. Small opportunity, therefore, was afforded her for what people nowadays talk of as self-expression. She was fair to look upon without being a commanding beauty. Her



disposition was amiable, her manners attractive. She had literary and intellectual interests. She was a devoted wife and mother. All to the good, but all leaving no very distinctive impression. Her historical portrait is indefinite. We may turn therefore to *Rokeby*,<sup>1</sup> where Scott gives, as seems to be fairly clearly established, her portrait as seen through the lover's eye (see Chapter VII.). Perhaps the most significant thing in that portrait is how her doting father remarks that his Maud is the merriest of them all. Why should this be matter of parental remark? It suggests a certain normal seriousness, wistfulness, pensiveness which accords with the spirit of the ode to *Time*, which seems to have touched some chord in her heart.<sup>2</sup> All this is somewhat vague and speculative. One does not really know Williamina. But all such testimony as is available is unanimous as to her charm and grace and goodness.

#### WILLIAM FORBES

Sir William Forbes, Baronet, of Pitsligo (1739–1806), was perhaps the most distinguished and wholly meritorious Scot who never achieved such greatness as leaves a name familiar among his countrymen. Although the heir to an old baronetcy, he was educated in poverty and obscurity and he was a self-made man. In 1754 he entered as an apprentice the service of Messrs. Coutts, who then

<sup>1</sup> See p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 104.

had a banking business in Edinburgh. There he steadily rose, and when the Coutts severed their connection with Edinburgh, Forbes became head of the Bank which still lives and flourishes as the Union Bank of Scotland. In the business he amassed a large fortune which enabled him to purchase the old family estates of Pitsligo. He became a recognised financial authority, and was consulted by Pitt, who offered him an Irish peerage, in which, however, he refused to sink his Scottish baronetcy. But if finance was his business it was not his sole interest. For thirty years Forbes was the first citizen of Edinburgh. Many of the leading institutions of the city date from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and there are hardly any of them in the inception of which Forbes did not play a prominent part. In Aberdeenshire he promoted large schemes of rural and agricultural development. Moreover this successful man of business and philanthropist was also a man of letters. He was a member of the Johnsonian circle in London. He wrote a life of the poet Beattie and a number of fragments, including a memoir of his mother and an autobiographical work, *Memories of a Banking House*. Jeffrey, in the *Edinburgh Review*, and Scott, in the fourth canto of *Marmion*, unite in his praise. All men of all shades of political opinion and degrees of social status spoke well of Sir William Forbes; and now, after a century and a quarter, there seems no reason to doubt but that all men spoke justly and wisely.

The eldest son of Sir William Forbes by his marriage to Elizabeth Hay, daughter of Sir James Hay of Smithfield, was the second Sir William Forbes (1773-1828). This William Forbes was Scott's successful rival for the hand of Williamina Belsches. Of any romance in which he played a personal part Walter Scott must be the hero. The rival of the hero of a romance is generally the devil of the piece. But it would be hard to imagine a less forbidding or a more amiable devil than William Forbes, junior. Although he did not attain to the stature of his father as a leader among men, he conducted the banking business and the management of his estates with equal efficiency and success, whilst his person and character commanded universal esteem.

Oddly enough the most striking testimony to the worth of Sir William Forbes the second comes from the pen of his defeated rival, Sir Walter Scott, with whom, even in the hour of strain, his personal friendship appears to have been unbroken. That belongs, however, rather to the sequel of the romance than to the introduction (see Chapter VI.). What here concerns us is William Forbes at twenty-three, for that was his age when he won the lady's hand. He was certainly a most eligible suitor. He was the heir to an ancient baronetcy and to an honoured name, to broad acres, and to the headship of a great banking firm. His frame was goodly, his features ruggedly handsome. He was a sportsman and a

skilful horseman. His abilities were good, his character was blameless. He was manly, straightforward, generous, and lovable. Truly *un beau cavalier*! "A high-spirited noble fellow." That was Scott's verdict after all had come and gone. Such was the third side of the triangle.

## CHAPTER II

### LOCKHART'S ACCOUNT

LOCKHART's guarded account is the chief source of the story of Sir Walter Scott's first love. He writes under a sense of reserve and does not mention names. When Lockhart wrote, the story was forty years old. But to those whose memories to-day carry them so far back, the events of 1890 do not appear very remote. All the three actors were dead, but their children and other members of their families who remembered them were still alive. Both sets of children owed their being to Scott's disappointment. Moreover, Lady Scott was held in affectionate remembrance by her children, and the story might be deemed to show that to Scott she was a second best.

These considerations seemed to Lockhart to impose a certain reticence and they also prompted the apology which appears in the Preface to his *Life of Scott*.

I foresee that some readers may be apt to accuse me of trenching upon delicacy in certain details of the sixth and seventh chapters in this volume. Though the circumstances there treated of had no trivial influence on Sir Walter Scott's history and character, I should have



been inclined, for many reasons, to omit them; but the choice was, in fact, not left to me,—for they had been mentioned, and misrepresented, in various preceding sketches of the Life which I had undertaken to illustrate. Such being the case, I considered it as my duty to tell the story truly and intelligibly; but I trust I have avoided unnecessary disclosures;—and after all, there was nothing to disclose that could have attached blame to any of the parties concerned.

### GREEN MANTLE

The first reference to the matter in Lockhart's Life is as follows (Edinburgh Edition, i. 161):

I find in another letter of this collection<sup>1</sup>—and it is among the first of the series—the following passage:

“Your Quixotism, dear Walter, was highly characteristic. From the description of the blooming fair, as she appeared when she lowered her *manteau vert*, I am hopeful you have not dropt the acquaintance. At least I am certain some of our more rakish friends would have been glad enough of such an introduction.”

This hint I cannot help connecting with the first scene of *The Lady Green Mantle* in *Redgauntlet*; but indeed I could easily trace many more coincidences between these letters and that novel, though at the same time I have no sort of doubt that William Clerk was, in the main, *Darsie Latimer*, while Scott himself unquestionably sat for his own picture in young *Alan Fairford*.

The allusion to “our more rakish friends” is in keeping with the whole strain of this juvenile correspondence. Throughout there occurs no coarse or even jocular suggestion as to the conduct of *Scott* in that particular, as to

<sup>1</sup> Letters said to have been written to Scott by David Erskine of Cardross.

which most youths of his then age are so apt to lay up stores of self-reproach. In this season of hot and impetuous blood he may not have escaped quite blameless, but I have the concurrent testimony of all the most intimate among his surviving associates, that he was remarkably free from such indiscretions; that while his high sense of honour shielded him from the remotest dream of tampering with female innocence, he had an instinctive delicacy about him which made him recoil with utter disgust from low and vulgar debaucheries. His friends, I have heard more than one of them confess, used often to rally him on the coldness of his nature. By degrees they discovered that he had, from almost the dawn of the passions, cherished a secret attachment, which continued, through all the most perilous stage of life, to act as a romantic charm in safeguard of virtue. This—(however he may have disguised the story by mixing it up with the Quixotic adventure of the damsel in the green mantle)—this was the early and innocent affection to which we owe the tenderest pages, not only of *Redgauntlet*, but of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and of *Rokeby*. In all of these works the heroine has certain distinctive features, drawn from one and the same haunting dream of his manly adolescence.

As appears from the foregoing passage, the lady in the Green Mantle of *Redgauntlet* was not a pure invention, but corresponded in some way to an early adventure of Scott's. But Lockhart declines to identify this with Scott's first meeting with the lady of his young love. Probably Lockhart is right albeit a "higher critic" might differ, holding that where two episodes bearing such resemblance as do two romantic encounters were related of the same party, they were but two versions of the same tale.

Lockhart then proceeds (i. 162):

It was about 1790, according to William Clerk, that Scott was observed to lay aside that carelessness, not to say slovenliness, as to dress, which used to furnish matter for joking at the beginning of their acquaintance. He now did himself more justice in these little matters, became fond of mixing in general female society, and, as his friend expresses it, "began to set up for a squire of dames".

I have heard him, in talking of this part of his life, say with an arch simplicity of look and tone which those who were familiar with him can fill in for themselves,—"It was a proud night with me when I first found that a pretty young woman could think it worth her while to sit and talk with me, hour after hour, in a corner of the ball-room, while all the world were capering in our view".

#### THE GREYFRIARS' RENCONTRE

I believe, however, that the "pretty young woman" here specially alluded to had occupied his attention long before he ever appeared in the Edinburgh Assembly Rooms, or any of his friends took note of him as "setting up for a squire of dames". I have been told that their acquaintance began in the Greyfriars' Churchyard, where rain beginning to fall one Sunday as the congregation was dispersing, Scott happened to offer his umbrella, and the tender being accepted, so escorted her to her residence, which proved to be at no great distance from his own. To return from church together had, it seems, grown into something like a custom, before they met in society, Mrs. Scott being of the party. It then appeared that she and the lady's mother had been companions in their youth, though, both living secludedly, they had scarcely seen each other for many years, and the two matrons now renewed their former intercourse.

But no acquaintance appears to have existed between the fathers of the young people, until things had advanced in appearance further than met the approbation of the good Clerk to the Signet.

Being aware that the young lady, who was very highly connected, had prospects of fortune far above his son's, the upright and honourable man conceived it his duty to give her parents warning that he observed a degree of intimacy which, if allowed to go on, might involve the parties in future pain and disappointment. He had heard his son talk of a contemplated excursion to the part of the country in which his neighbour's estates lay, and not doubting that Walter's real object was different from that which he announced, introduced himself with a frank statement that he wished no such affair to proceed without the express sanction of those most interested in the happiness of persons as yet too young to calculate consequences for themselves. The northern baronet had heard nothing of the young apprentice's intended excursion, and appeared to treat the whole business very lightly. He thanked Mr. Scott for his scrupulous attention—but added, that he believed he was mistaken; and this paternal interference, which Walter did not hear of until long afterwards, produced no change in his relations with the object of his growing attachment.

I have neither the power nor the wish to give in detail the sequel of this story. It is sufficient to say, that after he had through several long years nourished the dream of an ultimate union with this lady, his hopes terminated in her being married to a gentleman of the highest character, to whom some affectionate allusions occur in one of the greatest of his works, and who lived to act the part of a most generous friend to his early rival throughout the anxieties and distresses of 1826–27. I have said enough for my purpose—which was only to render intelligible a few allusions in the letters which I shall by

and by have to introduce; but I may add, that I have no doubt this unfortunate passion, besides one good effect already adverted to, had a powerful influence in nerving Scott's mind for the sedulous diligence with which he pursued his proper legal studies, as described in his Memoir, during the two or three years which preceded his call to the bar.

I confess I am disposed to accept this story *cum grano*. One need not hesitate to question Lockhart, for he fell into a number of errors as these pages will show. It is clear, as he himself admits, that he had not the story from Scott himself, and I can think of no member of Scott's family conversant with the circumstances who could have communicated it to him when he was preparing the Life. Doubtless he had gathered gossip about it from Kinnedder and others, but he was not then collecting materials for a life of Scott. One need not doubt but that the personal acquaintance of Scott and Williamina began in the manner indicated or that Lady Jane had been an early acquaintance of Mrs. Scott. But one may doubt whether Scott picked up a walking acquaintance with a young lady whose family were strangers and introduced this family to his own. Mrs. Scott and Sir John Belsches, advocate, had both been reared more or less in Edinburgh—a far smaller Edinburgh than that of the present day. Moreover, they were of kin. Mrs. Scott's mother was a Swinton and Sir John's grandmother was a Swinton: and the Swintons are peculiarly tenacious of family relationship. In the case of Mrs. Scott, therefore, there can



hardly have been a "discovery" of an old youthful acquaintanceship. Mrs. Scott and her family must have known all about the noble alliance which her kinsman John Belsches had entered into. The idea of two elderly ladies renewing a friendship of girlhood over the *rencontre* of their children is picturesque, but hardly fits the facts. Lady Jane, born in 1755, was a comparatively young woman when Scott made the acquaintance of her daughter. Mrs. Scott, who was some twenty years her senior, married in 1758, just three years after Lady Jane's birth.

The accepted romantic story was that Scott, on leaving Greyfriars' Church during a shower, offered a "young lady", a stranger to himself, a share of his umbrella, and that this was the beginning of a regular walking-home-from-church-together acquaintance, the families being at the time otherwise strangers. But even Lockhart seems to have realised the unlikelihood of this story, for, in relation to the walking home together, he throws in parenthetically, as much perhaps as a concession to the probabilities as to the proprieties—"Mrs. Scott being of the party". The idea of Lady Jane holding back while Mrs. Scott chaperoned the young people, because Mrs. Scott "had not called", seems rather far-fetched.

### THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

Lockhart "believes" that the acquaintance began "long before" 1790—the date at which, according to

William Clerk, Scott began to lay aside his slovenliness and to attend to his personal appearance. This suggests, say, 1787. If it were so, Scott was then a lad of sixteen and Williamina Belsches a child of eleven. My impression is that the Greyfriars incident, such as it was, happened at a later date when Williamina was of an age to make the offer of the umbrella an act more of gallantry than of compassion.

But be this as it may, Scott appears to have had no thought of Miss Belsches before 1791, other than, it may be, as an acquaintance or a lively young friend. In his Diary he speaks of "my three years of dreaming and my two years of wakening". In another passage he refers to two years of a broken heart. If the two years are one and the same we must count back from the date of his engagement to Miss Carpenter in the autumn of 1797, but even if we count back from the final rupture with Miss Belsches, this carries us back only to 1791, just about the time when in the Assembly Rooms—"It was a proud night with me when I found that a pretty young woman could think it worth her while to sit and talk with me, hour after hour, in a corner of the ballroom, while all the world were capering in our view". This "discovery" is quite consistent with prior acquaintanceship, but seems hardly consistent with any close intimacy, or a long and great prior attachment. But indeed if Lockhart is right, as he probably is, in thinking that the "pretty young woman" who "sat out" with Scott

at the Assembly Rooms was Williamina Belsches, I think he must be in error as to the date. Williamina Belsches was only fifteen in 1791.

The incident of the paternal warning connects itself, I think, with a later date than Lockhart seems to have supposed. Scott, he states, contemplated an excursion to Kincardineshire for some purpose which he announced. In the summer of 1793 Scott made an excursion to Dunnottar in Kincardineshire. But this was a day excursion apparently from the residence of his friend Mr. Murray of Simprim, Meigle, where he found himself in the course of a round of visits. This hardly fits the special purpose of a visit to Kincardineshire. But in the spring of 1796 Scott did make an excursion to Kincardineshire for the purpose of making certain antiquarian investigations. The attitude of "the Northern Baronet", as Lockhart describes him, is interesting but inconclusive. But if I am right in my conjecture as to the date of this visit, he was probably satisfied by that time that so far as his daughter was concerned there was no cause for anxiety.

Upon 30th September 1792, Scott writes to William Clerk (Lockhart, i. 192):

I have no prospect of seeing my *chère adorable* till winter, if then.

"If then" seems to suggest that wintering in Edinburgh was not a matter of course with the lady's family at that time, though undoubtedly, as

appears from the Directory, the father had then a house in Edinburgh.

Referring to the winter of 1793-94, Lockhart says (i. 215):

His love affair continued on exactly the same footing as before;—and for the rest, like the young heroes in *Redgauntlet*, he “swept the boards of the Parliament House with the skirts of his gown; laughed, and made others laugh; drank claret at Bayle’s, Fortune’s, and Walker’s, and ate oysters in the Covenant Close”.

The next reference (i. 231) is as follows:

To return for a moment to Scott’s love affair. I find him writing as follows, in March 1795, to his cousin, William Scott, now laird of Raeburn, who was then in the East Indies: “The lady you allude to has been in town all this winter, and going a good deal into public, which has not in the least altered the meekness of her manners. Matters, you see, stand just as they did.”

According to Lockhart, then, in 1793-94 the affair “was on the same footing as before”. According to Scott, in March 1795, “Matters stand just as they did”. But how did they stand? What was the footing? In the light of what subsequently transpires it must be taken that, whilst certainly there was no public betrothal, there was no engagement even between the parties themselves and not even an understanding. Scott was passionately in love with the lady, but he was not in a position to propose marriage and he had not declared himself.

## THE DECLARATION

But in August 1795, acting upon the advice of a friend, whom Lockhart does not name, Scott declared himself by letter. The passage in Lockhart is as follows (i. 232):

To another friend he writes thus, from Rosebank, on the 23rd August 1795: "It gave me the highest satisfaction to find, by the receipt of your letter of the 14th current, that you have formed precisely the same opinion with me, both with regard to the interpretation of ——'s letter as highly flattering and favourable, and to the mode of conduct I ought to pursue—for, after all, what she has pointed out is the most prudent line of conduct for us both, at least till better days, which, I think myself now entitled to suppose, she, as well as myself, will look forward to with pleasure. If you were surprised at reading the important billet you may guess how agreeably I was so at receiving it; for I had, to anticipate disappointment,—struggled to suppress every rising gleam of hope;—and it would be very difficult to describe the mixed feelings her letter occasioned, which, *entre nous*, terminated in a very hearty fit of crying. I read over her epistle about ten times a-day, and always with new admiration of her generosity and candour—and as often take shame to myself for the mean suspicions which, after knowing her so long, I could listen to, while endeavouring to guess how she would conduct herself. To tell you the truth, I cannot but confess that my *amour propre*, which one would expect should have been exalted, has suffered not a little upon this occasion, through a sense of my own *unworthiness*, pretty similar to that which afflicted Linton upon sitting down at Keir's table. I ought perhaps to tell you, what indeed you will perceive from her letter, that I was always attentive,



while consulting with you upon the subject of my declaration, rather to under than over-rate the extent of our intimacy. By the way, I must not omit mentioning the respect in which I hold your knowledge of the fair sex, and your capacity of advising in these matters, since it certainly is to your encouragement that I owe the present situation of my affairs. I wish to God that, since you have acted as so useful an auxiliary during my attack, which has succeeded in bringing the enemy to terms, you would next sit down before some fortress yourself, and were it as impregnable as the rock of Gibraltar, I should, notwithstanding, have the highest expectations of your final success.

. . . . .

“I think of being in town some time next month, but whether for good and all, or only for a visit, I am not certain. O for November! Our meeting will be a little embarrassing one. How will she look, etc. etc. etc., are the important subjects of my present conjectures—how different from what they were three weeks ago! I give you leave to laugh when I tell you seriously, I had begun to ‘dwindle, peak and pine’, upon the subject—but now, after the charge I have received, it were a shame to resemble Pharaoh’s lean kine. If good living and plenty of exercise can avert that calamity, I am in little danger of disobedience, and so, to conclude classically,

*“Dicite Io pæan, et Io bis dicite pæan!—”*

The letter of Miss Belsches, to which Scott here refers, presents a puzzling problem. It is much easier to divine the terms of Scott’s letter which called forth this reply than the terms of the reply itself. Scott had written to Miss Belsches reminding her of their long friendship, declaring his passion, but

stating that he realised the disparity of their circumstances and feared that it might be regarded as a barrier to union. But what was the nature of the reply? If one could get a hold of this letter, which has probably perished, one would probably have a much clearer understanding of the first love episode of Scott's life. It seems clear that Miss Belsches must have written with some reservation. True, Scott speaks of the candour of the letter, but he immediately refers to its "interpretation" as to which he had desired the opinion of a friend—an unusual need in the case of a love letter. It may be taken, I think, that the lady did not forbid Scott to hope. But, on the other hand, it seems clear that she did not unreservedly give herself to him for better or worse. Matters were not to be pushed. They were to maintain friendly but circumspect relations. So much is perhaps fairly clear. The rest is matter of speculation. But apparently it may be taken that Miss Belsches disclaimed any other attachment or any despite of Scott on account of his exiguous resources.

But upon the crucial question, Scott's account of the letter throws no certain light. Did Miss Belsches indicate that, whilst Scott was not forbidden to hope, there were other than merely patrimonial or financial obstacles to an engagement; that whilst she had a great regard for Scott, he had not yet wholly won her heart; that she was not yet prepared to pledge her troth to him. Had she said this in so many words the letter could hardly have needed interpretation.

But this may have been its true interpretation. My impression is that the letter was really colder and more indefinite than Scott's references to it suggest, and that the correspondent whom he consulted about it had to make the best of it and put the most comforting face upon it. Possibly the vigour with which the lady disclaimed any despatch of Scott in respect of his circumstances misled him. This was what had obsessed him, and when this cloud was lifted he failed to realise that he had not gained the one thing needful. It appears that Scott's friends were apprehensive that he was subject to some illusion as to the lady's attitude. The showing of the letter to a friend strikes one as odd, for no letter seems inherently to bear more the mark of privacy than a letter from a young lady in which she neither accepts nor rejects a suitor. But one does not know enough of the circumstances or of the terms of the letter to pass any judgment. Certainly, however, as is pointed out in a Note on p. 59, the number of Scott's confidants was remarkable.

#### SOME SELF-DECEPTION

What Lockhart conveys is that devotion and avowal thereof was all upon one side, that even before another appeared upon the scene Scott's friends realised that he had never completely won the heart of the lady, or had lost it after she had reached an age to take matters seriously.

As one of his friends put it, "they thought there

was some self-deception on the part of our romantic friend" (Lockhart, i. 242).

"O for November!" writes Scott. "Our meeting will be a little embarrassing one". I fancy, however, that when the meeting took place there was no embarrassment and that this was the beginning of Scott's "wakening". Miss Belsches greeted Scott as if nothing had happened. There were no confidences between them.

All the available evidence seems to confirm this view of the matter except two items. The one is the complete and permanent break of even formal relations between Scott and the lady or her family after her marriage, whilst maintaining friendly intercourse with her husband. The other is two lines in the verses on a Violet, verses which Kinnedder ascribed to the final rupture (Lockhart, i. 243).

Nor longer in my *false* love's eye  
Remains the tear of parting sorrow.

But this is verse, and verse written, if Kinnedder be right, in an hour of bitterness.

A frequent correspondent of Scott was his mother's sister, Miss Christian Rutherford. From this correspondence Lockhart (i. 237) quotes:

On 5th June 1796 he writes as follows to his aunt, Christian Rutherford, who was then in the north of Scotland, and had meant to visit, among other places, the residence of the "chère adorable".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The fact that Mrs. Scott's sisters, the Misses Rutherford, were on visiting terms with the Belsches tends to confirm the doubt as to

"By way of enquiry, pray let me know—that is, when you find an idle hour—how you accomplished the perilous passage of her (*sic* in Lockhart) Majestic's Ferry without the assistance and escort of your preux-chevalier, and whether you will receive them on your return—how Miss R.<sup>2</sup> and you are spending your time, whether stationary or otherwise—above all, whether you have been at \_\_\_\_\_, and all the etc's. etc's. which the question involves."

### LOCKHART'S DENOUEMENT

The end of Scott's young love came in 1796, and Lockhart gives his account of it. This account is almost wholly inaccurate, as will be shown in Chapter IV., but, as it is the accepted version, I give it here as Lockhart states it (i. 239):

During the autumn of 1796 he visited again his favourite haunts in Perthshire and Forfarshire. It was in the course of this tour that he spent a day or two at Montrose with his old tutor Mitchell, and astonished and grieved that worthy Presbyterian by his zeal about witches and fairies. The only letter of his, written during this expedition, that I have recovered, was addressed to another of his clerical friends—one by no means of Mitchell's stamp—Mr. Walker, the minister of Dunnottar, and it is chiefly occupied with an account of his researches at a vitrified fort in Kincardineshire, commonly called *Lady Fenella's Castle*, and, according

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whether Lockhart was right in representing the acquaintance of Mrs. Scott with her kinsfolk as having originated in the rencontre at Greyfriars' Church.

<sup>2</sup> *Voilà* the change of manners! Scott's mother's sister, his aunt Janet, is always "Miss Rutherford".



to tradition, the scene of the murder of Kenneth II. by his mistress. While in the north, he visited also the residence of the lady who had now for so many years been the object of his attachment; and that his reception was not adequate to his expectations may be gathered pretty clearly from some expressions in a letter addressed to him when at Montrose by his friend and confidante, Miss Cranstoun.<sup>1</sup>

. . . . .

The affair in which this romantic creature took so lively an interest was now approaching its end. It was known, before this autumn closed, that the lady of his vows had finally promised her hand to his amiable rival; and when the fact was announced, some of those who knew Scott the best, appear to have entertained very serious apprehensions as to the effect which the disappointment might have upon his feelings. For example, one of those brothers of *the Mountain* wrote as follows to another of them on the 12th October 1796:—"Mr. — marries Miss —. This is not good news. I always dreaded there was some self-deception on the part of our romantic friend, and I now shudder at the violence of his most irritable and ungovernable mind. Who is it that says, 'Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for LOVE'? I hope sincerely it may be verified on this occasion."

Scott had, however, in all likelihood, digested his agony during the solitary ride in the Highlands to which Miss Cranstoun's last letter alludes.

I forbear in the meantime to comment upon these passages, because the narrative is largely displaced by what appears in Chapter IV.

<sup>1</sup> This letter is to be found in Chapter IV. As Lockhart quite misunderstands the letter, it is withheld here as tending to confusion.

## CHAPTER III

### THE WITNESS OF THE JOURNAL

SCOTT kept a journal as a record both of events and of impressions from 1825 to near his death in 1832. The publication of this Journal under the editorship of the late Mr. David Douglas in 1890 greatly quickened interest in the personality of Scott—an interest which has been maintained during the last forty years at a higher level than during the like period preceding the date of publication of the Journal. To no writer other than Samuel Pepys has it been given to make a posthumous contribution to English literature of like value.

In both these diaries one sees from the inside what hitherto the world had only known from the outside. But here the parallel ends. As the late Lord Guthrie points out somewhere, Pepys is an example of a man whose private character belied his public reputation. Pepys's was of a highly creditable and blameless public reputation—a patriotic, painstaking, and conscientious public servant, held in high esteem by such a man as Evelyn. That was the outside as the world knew him. But the diary as Guthrie read it

shows a very different inside—a selfish, mean, flighty, frivolous, conceited, lascivious little man with an aroma of middle-class respectability. Scott, like Pepys, had a reputation as regarded by the world from the outside. I recall how long before the publication of the *Journal* the late Professor Masson told his students, “There may be room for difference of opinion in regard to the measure of Scott’s genius. There can be none as to the nobility of his character. ‘Goodness’ may seem a humdrum word to use of a poet and romancist, but I can find none better. The simple goodness of Scott was inexhaustible in its richness and depth.”

Such was the world’s verdict upon the outside; and the inside as revealed in the *Journal* amply confirms that verdict. It is not, however, within the scope hereof to pursue or illustrate this argument. The only observation is that the vast range of reading and information incidentally disclosed in the *Journal* throws light upon the infinite variety of the material used in the romances.

Scott’s own romance occurred within the first seven years of his manhood. The *Journal* covers the last seven years of his life. One does not therefore look for much material in the latter bearing upon the former, but there are some not unimportant gleanings.

There are several references to the early love in the pages of the *Journal*. Under date 18th December 1825 Scott writes:



SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.

*(By Sir John Watson Gordon)*





What a life mine has been—half educated, almost wholly neglected or left to myself stuffing my head with most nonsensical trash and undervalued in society for a time by most of my companions, getting forward and held a bold and clever fellow contrary to the opinion of all who thought me a mere dreamer, broken-hearted for two years, my heart handsomely pieced again, but the crack will remain to my dying day. . . .

The last words are self-revealing. Scott was a loyal and affectionate husband, but there was not quite the same glamour, and Scott at times seems to realise this.

There is a veiled reference to the matter in an entry of 26th January 1826 when Scott, writing in a kindly way about Sir William Forbes, says:

It is fated our planets should cross though, and that in the periods most interesting for me. Down—down a hundred thoughts.<sup>1</sup>

Upon 16th June 1827, Scott visited St. Andrews with a party from Balcaskie. Lady Scott, it may here be noted, died upon 15th May 1826.

I did not go up to St. Rule's tower as on former occasions: that is a falling off, for when before did I remain sitting below when there was a steeple to be ascended. But the rheumatism has begun to change that vein for some time past, though I think this is the first decided sign of my acquiescence in my lot.<sup>2</sup> I sat down on a

<sup>1</sup> See a somewhat similar expression in a letter written in the hour of anguish, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Largely owing to his own comments one is prone to think of Scott at this time as an old man, but he was only 56. Life seems to have moved more rapidly in these days. Scott was one year junior to

gravestone and recollected the first visit I made to St. Andrews now thirty-four years ago.<sup>1</sup> What changes in my feeling and my fortune have since taken place, some for the better and some for the worse. I remembered the name I then carved in Runic characters on the turf beside the Castle gate and I asked why it should still agitate my heart. But my friends came down from the tower and the foolish idea was chased away.

### “A SUMMONS FROM THE GRAVE”

The next entry bearing upon the matter is under date 25th October 1827.

When I came home a surprise amounting nearly to a shock reached me in another letter from L. J. S. Methinks this explains the gloom which hung about me yesterday. I own that the recurrence to these matters seems like a summons from the grave. It fascinates me. I ought perhaps to have stopped at once, but I have not nerve to do so. Alas! alas! But why alas! *Humani perpersi sumus.*

With reference to his entry in the Journal Mr. David Douglas gives the following explanation:—

On the 13th of October Sir Walter had received a letter from “one who had in former happy days been no stranger”, and on turning to the signature he found to his astonishment that it was from Lady Jane Stuart, with whom he had had no communication since the memor-

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Wellington, but in 1827, Waterloo lay twelve years behind. At 45 life lay behind Napoleon and Wellington. At 45 it lay before Moltke, Foch, Hindenburg, and Haig. Pitt died a worn-out man at 47, and X and Y, with thirty more summers, are still with us and with no signs of weariness.

<sup>1</sup> In 1793, Scott was then 22 and Williamina Belsches 17 years of age.

able visit he had made to Invermay<sup>1</sup> in the autumn of 1796. The letter was simply a formal request on behalf of a friend for permission to print some ballads in Scott's handwriting which were in an album that had apparently belonged to her daughter, yet it stirred Scott's nature to its depths.

The substance of his reply may be gathered from the second letter which he had just read before making the sad entry in his journal. Lady Jane tells him that she would convey to him the manuscript book "as a secret and sacred treasure could I but know that you would like it as I give it without a draw-back or misconstruction of my intentions", and she adds: "Were I to lay open my heart (of which you know little indeed) you will find that it has and ever shall be warm towards you. My age (she was then seventy-five) encourages me and I have longed to tell you. Not the mother who bore you followed you more anxiously (though secretly) with her blessing than I. Age has tales to tell and sorrows to unfold."

This correspondence led to personal intercourse between Scott and Lady Jane Stuart. The reintroduction to this intercourse was affected through Mrs. Skene of Rubislaw, an intimate friend of Scott's, who accompanied him to Lady Jane's house, 12 Maitland Street, which was nearly opposite Scott's own temporary home at 6 Shandwick Place. Mrs. Skene was herself a sister of Sir William Forbes and therefore a sister-in-law of Scott's old love, Lady Jane Stuart's daughter. Lockhart (vii. 63) seems rather to misrepresent the occasion of this visit,

<sup>1</sup> Invermay is a mistake. See p. ix. Mr. Douglas, like Lockhart, knew a great deal about Scott, but, like Lockhart, he was in error as to this episode in Scott's life.

which he attributed to Scott's having discovered a few days after he took possession of his house at 6 Shandwick Place, that Lady Jane lived near at hand, entirely ignoring the previous references in the Journal to recent correspondence between them, and also incidentally ignoring the fact that the first visit Scott paid to Lady Jane was on the day he took possession of 6 Shandwick Place.<sup>1</sup> He proceeds:

Mrs. Skene complied with the request and she tells me that a very painful scene ensued, adding, "I think it highly probable that it was on returning from this call that he committed to writing the verses *To Time* by his early favourite which you have printed on p. 244 of your first volume".

Scott's account of this interview is:

Novr. 6. I waited on L. J. S., an affecting meeting.

The very next day Scott called again upon Lady Jane.

November 7. Began to settle myself this morning after the hurry of mind and even of body which I have lately undergone. . . . I went to make *another* visit and fairly softened myself like an old fool with recalling old stories till I was fit for nothing but shedding tears and repeating verses for the whole night. This is sad work. The very grave gives up its dead and time rolls back thirty years to add to my perplexities. I don't care. I begin to grow overhardened, and like a stag turning at bay my naturally good temper grows fierce and dangerous. Yet what

<sup>1</sup> Scott arrived in Edinburgh upon 4th November 1827 and spent two nights with Mr. John Gibson, W.S. The desire to see Lady Jane must have been strong upon him as he was in the midst of perplexing financial and other business.

a romance to tell, and told I fear it will one day be. And then my three years of dreaming and my two years of wakening will be chronicled doubtless. But the dead will feel no pain.

Lockhart quotes the entry under 7th November, but not the short entry under 6th November, and he quotes that of 7th November, as he states, to confirm Mrs. Skene in her conjecture that it was on returning from the visit, on which she accompanied Scott, that he wrote down the lines *To Time*.<sup>1</sup> Simple omission, however, of the entry of 6th November did not suffice. The “another” printed in italics above in the entry of 7th November was awkward, so Lockhart omits that word in his quotation!

The fascination of the “old stories” must have been strong upon Scott, for upon 10th November he again called upon Lady Jane.

Wrote out my last and little more. At twelve o'clock I went to poor Lady J. S. to talk over old stories. I am not clear that it is right or healthful indulgence to be ripping up old sorrows, but it seems to give her deep-seated sorrow words and this is a mental bloodletting. To me these things are now matter of calm and solemn recollection never to be forgotten, yet scarce to be remembered with pain.

Similarly upon 27th November he writes:—

I visited Lady S. on my return. Came home too fagged to do anything to purpose.

The contrast between the calm philosophy of the entry of 10th November and the “shock” and

<sup>1</sup> See p. 104.



"fascination" and "agitation at the heart" at St. Andrews in June, is curiously illustrative of mood.

Visits to Lady Jane are mentioned upon 10th December 1827 and 14th January and 25th February and 12th June 1829. But there are but casual references, and it is believed that there was considerable intercourse between Scott and Lady Jane in her last years. Lady Jane died somewhat suddenly upon 28th October 1829.

The foregoing extracts from the Journal confirm the contemporary impression that Scott's was not an ordinary love disappointment but a cataclysm which for a time threatened to destroy him. They also suggest that the memories "came over" him more after Lady Scott's death. True, in an entry made during her lifetime he notes that the heart though handsomely pieced has still a crack in it. But there is not in that entry the tremor that one finds in subsequent ones.

#### LADY JANE'S CHOICE

Lady Jane Stuart had probably the chief responsibility for the circumstance that her daughter married William Forbes, an honourable heir to a baronetcy and a successful banker, and not Walter Scott, the greatest Scotsman of his time and among the greatest of all time. But we must not judge Lady Jane hardly. Walter Scott's future was then unknown. Apart altogether from considerations of present financial resources William Forbes was the more eligible *parti*.

It cannot indeed for one moment be taken that Lady Jane, as regards the bestowal of her beloved daughter's hand, was indifferent to character and regardful only of financial and worldly considerations. Character! But where among the annals of his contemporaries or of his countrymen or of literature shall we find a character finer or more shining than that of Walter Scott. True, but Lady Jane's viewpoint was that of 1796, not of 1929. There was no stain or blemish in young Scott. He was neither a roué, a spendthrift, nor a debauchee, and he had been involved in no scandal or serious trouble of any kind. But doubts were entertained even by his admiring group of friends in regard to his solidity and stability. His mind was stored with what to them were dreams and fancies, and what to prosaic people like his worthy father were "maggots". There were doubts as to his perseverance in his profession. Doubtless some of the more discerning of his intimates saw the promise of literary success. But was not Oliver Goldsmith a literary success? Lady Jane, absorbed in the interests of her daughter, may have taken these things in, and she may also have been influenced too by some knowledge of the coterie who surrounded Scott at this time, good fellows all of them but somewhat boisterous, Bohemian, and convivial. To the lady who married John Belsches and lived with him in complete domestic felicity, Scott may very well have seemed to afford a doubtful prospect of domestic peace and happiness. William Forbes may well have

appeared a safer choice. There is no reason indeed to suppose that William Forbes was a muff or a prig or a "superior" young man. He was by all accounts a generous, manly fellow. But he was stable and solid and took life seriously upon the lines which had been laid down for him.

Another consideration may have been operative in Lady Jane's mind. Long engagements sometimes lead to disillusionment; but so too do long attachments and half-understandings. The danger is perhaps even greater in this latter case. The mind may not be quite fancy free, but there is not the restraint, the inevitableness, of a troth definitely plighted. Now, as is pointed out elsewhere, it seems to be doubtful whether Miss Belsches, at all events after she reached a marriageable age, reciprocated Scott's passionate devotion. If she had changed or if any calf love there may have been had never ripened into something more serious, her mother may very well have realised this.

However this may be, there seems to be nothing to suggest that Lady Jane and her husband constrained their daughter, as in the *Bride of Lammermoor*, to abandon a lover to whom she was devoted and to enter into an alliance with another against which she rebelled. Scott may have thought or half thought something of the kind and carried the impression throughout life; and this may help to explain the extraordinary revulsion of feeling which Lady Jane's approaches created. Lady Jane's letter showed that

Scott had not been scornfully and pitilessly spurned in favour of a more advantageous alliance as Scott may have thought all these years. The incident seems to indicate that there had been no intercourse between Scott and the Belsches-Stuart family since 1797, albeit there must have been many opportunities at all events of renewing some acquaintance of courtesy after the early awkwardness was past.<sup>1</sup> Lady Jane's approach came to Scott as a "voice from the dead".

Remorse infers a sense of wrongdoing. There is no reason to believe that Lady Jane carried throughout life a sense of having committed a wrong. But whatever may have been her daughter's feelings Lady Jane knew well that Scott was passionately in love with the damsel and that his heart-strings were wrung by the disappointment of his hopes. Lady Jane had a woman's heart and that heart had followed Scott all the way. No wonder that Scott was profoundly moved.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 95.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONGÉ

THE preceding chapters contain nothing that is wholly new save by way of collation which may be convenient, and of comment which may or may not be elucidatory. But in the present chapter one is brought into contact with new material. The traditional and accepted story is that Scott went to pay a visit at Invermay or Fettercairn,<sup>1</sup> that in the course of this visit it was brought home to him that he was not an accepted suitor, and that his affair with Miss Belsches must be brought to an end, and that he then plunged into the wilds of the Highlands to vent his grief. That story is not accurate and, though here I may err, it does not seem to be so venerable as to forbid disturbance by iconoclastic hands.

### THE LETTER THAT REVEALS

The following letter was addressed by Scott to Erskine, afterwards Lord Kinnedder, from Aberdeen. It is dated quite clearly and distinctly, "Aberdeen, 24th Sept. 1796". But through some extraordinary

<sup>1</sup> Mr. David Douglas and Mr. James Scott both mention Invermay. Lockhart gives no place-name.





*Valentine & Sons, Photo*

## FETTERCAIRN HOUSE, FROM THE GARDEN

*Note.*—The wing on right was not there in Scott's time



slip this date is wrong by ten or eleven days. The letter, as will be conclusively shown, was written upon 13th or 14th September 1796, in all probability 14th September. It is written upon five pages of letter paper and is folded in the usual way and addressed on the back "William Erskine, Advocate, London". It must have been enclosed in a more fully addressed cover to the care of somebody, and indeed this is apparent from a note in a strange handwriting where there is a tear—"tore by the seal of the cover". London on the address is scored out and "Edinburgh, N.B." substituted, and then apparently without cover the letter was reposted, for there is what seems to be a post-mark upon it. Erskine had left London before the letter arrived there and had returned to Edinburgh. It seems certain that he had other communications from Scott before he can have got this letter.

The letter, which is printed so as to show the corrections and misspellings, begins abruptly, as was not uncommon with Scott's familiar letters.

When I reflect how long I have been neglecting my promise to thee, when I consider, to let thee into a secret, that its present fulfillment is merely owing to the first rainy day which we have had for these four weeks, my very midriff would quiver with remorse were it not for the quieting consideration that thou art now so deeply engaged in the pleasures of thy beloved City that it must dwell

~~stand~~ ^ little in thy desires to learn the wanderings of such a forlorn pilgrim as myself—My motions however being at least as important to myself as

those of P.P. the Parish Clerk I shall the liberty of supposing them equally so to thee (a strong supposition in most cases, unless among Mountain Boys) & thus I begin my journal—Monday was three weeks I left the ancient city of Edin<sup>r</sup>—my equipage two ponies & Boy—or if you will two palfreys & a foot page.—Beside me pranced the Doughty Baron of Newton John James Edmonstone, on a most splendid Buccephalus—Next day view the same party drawn up with the addition of Lieut. Drummond of the Scottish cavalry, & the Laird of Symprim upon the field of Bannockburn—hear the Laird discant upon the position of the armies, Bruce Douglas & Randolph familiar in his mouth as household words, wheeling & caracoling as he became warmed with his subject—Next see us at John Ramsay's—then at Cambusmoir—& lastly, but how shall pen describe the scenery or spell the names, view ~~view~~ E—& me at the Trosshachs, a chain of most beautifull & romantic lakes running North west from Callander into the highlands. Monday was a fortnight I set out on my solitary journey up Loch Lubnich & round by Loch Earnhead to Crieff ~~was~~ great part of which journey I performed on foot—I was perfectly enchanted with your favourite ~~Arbruckle~~ ~~Arbruckle~~ (damn the name I shall never hit it) Aberichle, which is compleatly *selon mon gout*—At Comrie I saw a very extensive camp & a fine waterfall above the house—At Perth I saw what gave me more pleasure than all the camps & cascades in my tour, for I saw Miss Erskine tho only for half an hour—She has compleatly recovered her indisposition & is looking charmingly—Like a ~~cow~~ cloud upon a whirlwind did I pass thro the fat carse of Gowrie, thro Dundee, thro Arbroath, thro Montrose—At Benholm I was most

that neighbourhood till my return to the wilds.  
I bore myself from that quarter of the country.  
Road slowly trotted on to Aberdeen with many  
an anxious thought upon the shadows clouds and  
darkness that involve my future prospects of hap-  
-piness - I must not omit to tell you that Ben  
holm consists of an elegant modern horse built  
sawyer close to an ancient venerable tower the  
habitation of the old proprietors, which is preserved  
in complete repair as it looks down a steep  
woody Glen to the sea commands a delightful  
prospect - you will guess I was often to be found  
upon the battlements straining my eyes towards  
the distant Grampians - For Aberdeen I have





cordially received by Geo: Robertson Scott who is a develish good fellow, aye and a moderate thinking rational man too, tho' the spleen of party has dubb<sup>d</sup> him a Democrat—For a thousand reasons I referred any stay in that neighbourhood till my

so

return Southwards I I tore myself from that quarter of the country & sad & slowly trotted on to Aberdeen with many an anxious thought upon the shadows clouds and darkness that involve my future prospects of happiness—I must not omit to tell you that Benholm consists of an elegant modern house built ~~adjoin~~ close to an ancient & venerable Tower the habitation of the old proprietors, which is preserved in compleat repair as it looks down a steep woody Glen to the sea commands a delightfull prospect—you will guess I was often to be found upon the Battlements straining my eyes towards the Distant Grampians—In Aberdeen I have been most hospitably received by several freinds of my father—I returned yester-

30 miles to the Northwest

day from Freefield the seat of Mr. Leith ^ who maintains very much the ancient hospitable character of an old Scottish Gentleman—he is married to a relation of mine—Of Traditions &c. &c. I have collected enough to set your Sister & you asleep after supper (unless when startled by the rumbling of an Earse name) for 20 nights successively—I say nothing of my future motions further than that I leave this tomorrow & shall be in Edin<sup>r</sup> in about 8 days when I suppose I may almost expect to find you so that I shall have an answer in person to this long scrawl which I send merely to acquit me of my promise—I shall see your Sister on my return if she is still at Perth—I am you believe anxious enough on one score &

another & may well adopt the burden of an old song—"If it were na my heart's light, I wad die"—Of the other Montagnards I can say little—Clerk, Thomson, &c. &c. all in the country Cran-in town busy with Fountainhall & Mack with goose upon Kant—In the mean time Monroe, as what

I hear, is annoying Miss Jane Dalrymple—from ^ I can see that damned anatomist has a ~~mid~~ mind to bring upon his head a rock from the mountain—I hope you will not omitt to pick up a few German books—& remember Agnes Bernauerinn Well here's a long letter—quantity for quality—hay! Billy! hay!—Take of thyself in that Devil's drawing room into which thou hast gotten—As poor Tom says, Keep thy fingers from plackets & thy pen from Lenders Books & defy the foul fiend—But I know thee & the naughtiness of thy heart—& how thou art proud in flesh & high in mind—As for the trotting over four Inch Bridges that seems to be my share of poor Toms exploits—till I break my neck over one of them, believe me ever

Affectionately yours

Aberdeen

WALTER SCOTT.

24 Sept<sup>r</sup>

1796

*(Written on Back.)*

William Erskine Esq

Advocate

London

Edinburgh.

N.B.

---

*(Written on other side)*

"tore by the seal of the cover".

## THE INTERPRETATION

The story of the letter as supplemented by other information appears to be as follows. Erskine was in London (the "beloved city" referred to by Scott in his letter), where at this time he is said to have had negotiations about the publication of Scott's translations of German ballads. Scott set out from Edinburgh with a threefold object—to visit certain friends, to collect folklore, and above all to pay his vows at Fettercairn, where Miss Belsches and her father and mother were resident with her paternal grandmother, Mrs. Belsches or Stuart, for it seems not quite certain which name she at that time favoured.<sup>1</sup> For some reason not clearly disclosed Scott was in a state of profound uncertainty and anxiety, shared by his friends, as to his probable reception at Fettercairn. A Circuit Court at Aberdeen was due shortly, and possibly Scott used this as a pretext for journeying so far north. At this time Scott was the centre of a coterie of young advocate friends who took from and gave to the corner of the Parliament House, where they were wont to congregate, the name of "Mountain". In company with one of these friends, John James Edmonstone of Newton (near Doune), Scott set out from Edinburgh upon pony back upon Monday, 22nd August 1796. Next day they visited the field of Bannockburn in company with a young officer of the name of Drummond and Mr. Patrick

<sup>1</sup> In 1798 she had a Royal licence to bear the name of Stuart.

Murray of Simprim (Forfarshire), a zealous antiquarian. Murray described the battlefield and the position of the forces—a task for which he was well qualified, for he is described by Lockhart as “a gentleman whose enthusiastic passion for antiquities, and especially military antiquities, had peculiarly endeared him both to Scott and Clerk”. From Bannockburn Scott and Edmonstone found their way to Ochtertyre, the seat of John Ramsay, the patron of Burns and himself a scholar and antiquarian. There they probably spent a night, or it may be two, and next they proceeded to Cambusmore near Callander, the seat of Scott’s friend Buchanan. From Cambusmore Scott and Edmonstone visited the Trossachs. There were no inns in the Trossachs then, and it does not appear whether this was more than a one-day excursion. But apparently they returned to Cambusmore. Scott was certainly at Cambusmore upon Friday, 26th August, for on that day he inscribed his name in a book which he presented to Lady Charlotte Home, one of the party there. This book is an advance copy of his translation of German ballads published in October 1796. Scott and Edmonstone now parted, and upon Monday, 29th August, Scott set out northwards past Loch Lubnaig mounted upon a pony named Earwig<sup>1</sup> and accompanied by a boy upon another pony. As the country was new to him Scott did not “flash like lighting up Strathyre”, but dis-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 55.



mounted and went most of the way on foot. On reaching Lochearnhead he turned eastwards and found his way down Strathearn past Comrie to Crieff. In passing he took particular note of the mansion-house of Aberuchil, near Comrie, to which for some reason Erskine had called his attention. His next stage was Perth. Here he met, whether by chance or by appointment does not appear, Erskine's sister Mary Anne Erskine, an intimate friend of his. With her he had a conversation, in which he discussed his special mission to the north<sup>1</sup> apparently on despondent lines.

Miss Erskine herself had entered into an engagement to marry Archibald Campbell of Clathick (near Comrie) and she was married to him upon 19th September, *i.e.* in less than three weeks. But *she did not mention her engagement to Scott*, whom she regarded almost as a brother.<sup>2</sup> One can only conjecture that the reason of this extraordinary reticence may have been that the consent of her brother William Erskine, who was absent in London, had to be obtained. But the hurry of the wedding which recalled Erskine from London is not explained.

After leaving Perth Scott seems to have speeded up and proceeded rapidly through Dundee, Arbroath, and Montrose<sup>3</sup> on to Benholm in Kincardineshire,

<sup>1</sup> See Miss Erskine's letter, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> See her subscription to letter on eve of marriage, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> As he had given Montrose Post Office as his address in the north, he may have called there for letters and given instructions as to forwarding to Aberdeen. See p. 56.

where he was received as the guest of Mr. George Robertson-Scott of Benholm, with whom he does not appear to have been intimately acquainted hitherto. At Benholm Scott had got as far north as Fettercairn, but "for a thousand reasons" he "referred his stay in that neighbourhood" until his journey southwards. His "stay in that neighbourhood", what does this refer to? Not, I think, to a prearranged visit to Fettercairn, but probably to a halt in that district ostensibly in pursuit of matters of antiquarian interest which would enable him to pay his respects at Fettercairn. Besides Mr. Robertson-Scott he had two friends in the neighbourhood, Mr. Walker, the minister of Dunnottar, and Mr. Mitchell, the minister of the second charge of Montrose. Scott had probably an antecedent engagement to visit the latter, which in fact he did on his return journey. From the old tower at Benholm Scott gazed longingly towards the mountains in the west at the foot of which lay Fettercairn.

From Benholm Scott proceeded to Aberdeen. Apparently he carried letters of introduction to friends of his father in Aberdeen, by whom he was hospitably received, on what was probably his first visit to that city. A day or two were spent with Mr. Leith of Freefield, some thirty miles north-west of Aberdeen. Scott had returned to Aberdeen on the day before he wrote the letter to Erskine, and he intended to set out southwards on the following day, but not immediately to Edinburgh. His plans were

uncertain. Doubtless all turned upon Fettercairn and his reception there.

As already stated this letter is certainly misdated. Now that its contents have been explained there are materials for determining its date. There are two fixed termini. Upon Friday, 26th August, Scott was at Cambusmore on his way north, and he left Cambusmore on the following Monday, viz. the 29th. Upon Monday, 19th September (Miss Erskine's wedding day), Scott was at Kelso. He left Cambusmore upon Monday, 29th August, and more than a fortnight had elapsed ("Monday was a fortnight") when he wrote the Aberdeen letter. He had returned to Aberdeen from a visit thirty miles to the north "yesterday". This and the references to Mondays make it clear that the letter was not written upon a Monday. Nor if he wrote upon a Tuesday would he be likely to refer to Monday and not "yesterday", as he uses the word "yesterday" in the letter. This is not perhaps conclusive. But 24th for 14th was a less unlikely slip than 24th for 13th. I take it, then, as all but certain that the letter was written upon Wednesday, 14th September,<sup>1</sup> the only possibility

<sup>1</sup> The misdating of this letter is an illustration of how historical data which seems conclusive may mislead. Had it been a question of historical importance and dispute whether Scott was in Aberdeen in the fourth week of September 1796, the discovery of a letter by him dated from Aberdeen upon 24th September would have been regarded as conclusive of the question. Those who had supported an earlier date would have been utterly confounded. I have dealt with this matter elsewhere in pointing out that if the '45 were so remote as to allow of the question whether it was a myth, how strongly this theory would have been supported by a letter I have had in my hands, a long

which is not absolutely ruled out being Tuesday, the 13th.

#### LOCKHART'S MISTAKE

In the paragraphs from Lockhart dealing with the end of the love affair quoted in the immediately preceding chapter, reference is made to a letter from Miss Cranstoun which Lockhart prints, but for reasons which will now be obvious the quotation of this letter in this work was reserved for this chapter. The letter as given by Lockhart (i. 240) is as follows:

*To* WALTER SCOTT, Esq., Post Office, Montrose.

DEAR SCOTT,

Far be it from me to affirm that there are no diviners in the land. The voice of the people and the voice of God are loud in their testimony. Two years ago when I was in the neighbourhood of Montrose we had recourse for amusement one evening to chiromancy, or, as the vulgar say, having our fortunes read; and read mine were in such a sort, that either my letters must have been inspected, or the devil was by in his own proper person. I never mentioned the circumstance since, for obvious reasons; but now that you are on the spot, I feel it my bounden duty to conjure you not to put your shoes rashly from off your feet, for you are not standing on holy ground.<sup>1</sup>

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chatty letter written at Kennet by young Bruce, afterwards Lord Kennet, in which there is no reference to the rebellion, although on that very day Prince Charles crossed the Forth at the Fords of Frew, some 13 or 14 miles above Kennet.

<sup>1</sup> The drift of this passage is obscure. I think that Lockhart, who took great liberties with letters, must have excised something.

of him, believe me ever  
Affectionately yours  
Walter Scott  
Aberdeen ( )  
24 Sept. 1796

#### THE SIGNATURE AND THE MISDATE

William Erskine Esq  
Advocate  
~~Edinburgh~~ ~~London~~  
23

#### THE ADDRESS ON THE LETTER

*Note.*—The post-mark is on the other side.  
The sprawling line like a 7 is in ink. It cannot be explained.





I bless the gods for conducting your poor dear soul safely to Perth. When I consider the wilds, the forests, the lakes, the rocks—and the spirits in which you must have whispered to their startled echoes, it amazeth me how you escaped. Had you but dismissed your little squire and Earwig, and spent a few days as Orlando would have done, all posterity might have profited by it; but to trot quietly away, without so much as one stanza to despair—never talk to me of love again—never, never, never! I am dying for your collection of exploits. When will you return? In the meantime, Heaven speed you! Be sober, and hope to the end.

William Taylor's translation of your ballad is published, and so inferior, that I wonder we could tolerate it. Dugald Stewart<sup>1</sup> read yours to —— the other day. When he came to the fetter dance, he looked up and poor —— was sitting with his hands nailed to his knees, and the big tears rolling down his innocent nose in so piteous a manner, that Mr. Stewart could not help bursting out a-laughing. An angry man was —— . I have seen another edition, too, but it is below contempt. So many copies make the ballad famous, so that every day adds to your renown.

This here place is very, very dull. Erskine is in London; my dear Thomson<sup>2</sup> at Daily; Macfarlan<sup>3</sup> hatching Kant—and George<sup>4</sup> Fountainhall.<sup>5</sup> I have nothing more to tell you, but that I am most affectionately yours. Many an anxious thought I have about you. Farewell.—J. A. C.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Dugald Stewart was married to a sister of Miss Cranstoun.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Thomson, advocate, described by Lockhart as "the first legal antiquary of our time" (i. 203).

<sup>3</sup> "The chief, if not the only Kantist of the German class, was I believe John Macfarlan of Kirkton" (i. 204).

<sup>4</sup> George Cranstoun, advocate, Miss Cranstoun's brother, afterwards Lord Corehouse.

<sup>5</sup> Decisions by Lord Fountainhall.

Miss Cranstoun's letter is addressed to "Walter Scott Esquire, Post Office, Montrose". Clearly, therefore, Scott had left this as his address. There may be significance in the fact that whilst this is not Fettercairn, Montrose was within striking distance—14 miles—of Fettercairn. But the letter was forwarded to Scott at Aberdeen, presumably upon instructions which he left at or transmitted to the Post Office at Montrose. This is borne out by the fact that the letter could not have reached Montrose when Scott was passing north. On the other hand, it seems clear that Scott had received it before he wrote to Erskine. The jokes in regard to the avocations of Macfarlan and George Cranstoun are retailed from it (one may shrewdly surmise that it was the source also of the gossip about Miss Jean Dalrymple and Doctor Monroe,<sup>1</sup> which for obvious reasons Lockhart excised).

It will be seen on a comparison of Miss Cranstoun's letter with Scott's letter to Erskine that the two fit in and that Lockhart is wholly mistaken as to the circumstances under which the former was written and its intendment. Miss Cranstoun had heard (most probably from Miss Erskine) of Scott's arrival at Perth after the journey through Balquidder upon which he set out from Callander. This was upon his way north before he had made any approach to

<sup>1</sup> Jean Dalrymple was a daughter of Lord Hailes. She married in 1799 Sir James Fergusson of Kilkerran. Dr. Alexander Munroe was the third of the name who was Professor of Anatomy in the University of Edinburgh.

Fettercairn. Lockhart takes it that he was on his journey home after his repulse at Fettercairn, and after going up and down upon the mountains bewailing his fate like Jephtha's daughter. Lockhart takes comfort too in the thought that Scott had here "digested his agony" and emerged from the mountains chastened doubtless but calm and fortified. It may be, however, that Lockhart, as was not unnatural in the husband of a daughter of the lady who became Mrs. Scott, did not adequately realise the depth and the lasting smart of the wound. In any case, as Lockhart had, as he admits, no information about this journey to the north the error into which he fell in his interpretation was not unnatural.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless if Miss Cranstoun's letter had been written under the circumstances which Lockhart supposed, it would have been in bad taste. Playfully to rally the youth who is going forth to put it to the touch to win or lose it all is one thing; to mock him when he has lost is another.

#### THE APRIL VISIT

Lockhart quite misunderstood Miss Cranstoun's letter. But he also made a mistake which is less excusable in regard to another letter to which he refers but does not print. This was a letter of Scott

<sup>1</sup> It seems odd, however, if the address did not puzzle Lockhart, viz. "Post Office, Montrose", seeing that Scott, as Lockhart supposed, had plunged into the Highlands from the neighbourhood of Montrose and had emerged at Perth.

to Mr. Walker, the minister of Dunnottar.<sup>1</sup> This letter Lockhart attributes to the visit of Scott to the north in the autumn of 1796, and he connects it with the visit "to the residence of the lady who had been for so many years the object of his attachment" when "his reception was not adequate to his expectations". The letter is printed in Dr. Cowie Cameron's *History of Fettercairn*, published in 1899 (p. 136). It runs as follows:

MY DEAR SIR,

I take my first moment of disengagement to let you know the result of my enquiries at Lady Fenella's<sup>2</sup> Castle, which is, in my opinion, at least decidedly in favour of Tytler's opinion. I was detained at Fettercairn House by the hospitality of Sir John and Lady Jane two or three days longer than I expected, from which you will easily guess Miss Belsches was recovered and able to see company.

(The letter then goes on to explain the excavations and explorations made by Scott with the assistance of two labourers at the Castle of Greencairn.)

I am dying to hear about the well<sup>3</sup> at Dunnottar, &c. &c. I am likewise anxious about my old

<sup>1</sup> Scott first met Mr. Walker on the occasion of a visit to Dunnottar from Meikle. On this occasion he was introduced to Peter Paterson, the original of "Old Mortality".

<sup>2</sup> In 1802 Scott had a mare which he called "Fenella" (Lockhart, i. 361).

<sup>3</sup> "I see you admiring that broken rapier", he added, "addressing me (R. P. Gillies), and your interest would increase if you knew how much labour was required to bring it into my possession. I was obliged to drain the well at Dunnottar" (Lockhart, i. 361).



ballads, and I hope you will add to many favours I have already to acknowledge that of writing me very soon. My address is George's Square, Edinburgh. Compliments to Messrs. Logie and Wood. I hope they do not faint in the good work: if so I refer them to you for strength and consolation.

I have visited a beautiful ruin called Eagle (Edzell) Castle and was delighted. I have seen Caterthun and was astonished.

I hope this will find your whole familie from Nelly to Macgriegar inclusive in good health. Meantime we do most strictly charge you and command to keep an account of the Well expenditure and transmit it to us for a settlement of Accot.; and so we bid you heartily farewell.

Given from our Inn at Kinross the sixth day of May Jaivii<sup>c</sup> (1700) and ninety six years.

WALTER SCOTT.

The allusion to Miss Belsches in this letter conveys a strange impression. If there had been nothing between Scott and the lady and she had simply been known as a sprightly and attractive belle one could have understood it. But seeing how matters stood as regards Scott the allusion is peculiar, unless indeed his Reverend correspondent was in his confidence, which seems hardly likely.<sup>1</sup> But in any view this letter tends perhaps to cast some doubt upon the impression conveyed by Lockhart that matters were no longer as they had been, and that a drifting

<sup>1</sup> Scott, as will be seen, deprecated gossip about himself and Miss Belsches. But in this view the number of his confidants was somewhat alarming. Miss Cranstoun, Miss Erskine, W. Erskine, G. Cranstoun, W. Clerk, David Erskine, his aunt Miss C. Rutherford, his cousin William Scott of Raeburn, and probably his mother Mrs. Scott and his brother Tom.

away from him, obvious to Scott, had taken place during the winter months in Edinburgh, the realisation of which caused alarm to him and disquiet to his friends. Scott had been hospitably received at Fettercairn and pressed to prolong his visit that he might not be disappointed owing to the indisposition of the young lady. It seems strange that the cheerful and sprightly tone of this letter did not strike Lockhart as being hardly reconcilable with the final congé, the broken heart and the plunge into the wilds, and lead him to look carefully to its date.

It would appear that Scott had visited Dunnottar and set Mr. Walker to work upon the well. Either he had written from Fettercairn to Mr. Walker and mentioned Miss Belsches' indisposition, or while he was at Dunnottar he had received from Sir John Belsches a letter mentioning that Miss Belsches was indisposed, but that nevertheless he would be welcome to come and pursue his antiquarian researches. In view of Scott's father's hint to Sir John Belsches as to visits for ostensible purposes there may be room for a wicked suggestion behind this indisposition, but the matter is too doubtful and speculative to excuse such wickedness. Nevertheless enthusiastic antiquarian as Scott was, his interest in Williamina must have so much overshadowed his interest in Fenella that his immediate engagement upon his arrival at Fettercairn of men to howk out the ruins of the latter's stronghold is suggestive of a pretext for his visit.

Something happened, but it must have happened between the beginning of May and August following. Matters may not have been advanced during the spring visit, but Scott apparently had not felt himself to be discouraged, still less warned off. The allusion to the charm of the lady and the pressing hospitality of her parents in the May letter may be slight, but the tone is quite different from that of the letter to Erskine from Aberdeen on 14th September. What changed the Walter Scott waving a farewell to his kind hosts after some happy days at Fettercairn in May into the "forlorn pilgrim" of September gazing wistfully from Benholm towards Fettercairn and passing on to Aberdeen "with an anxious thought upon the shadows, clouds, and darkness that involve my future prospects of happiness". What had happened? It seems unlikely that Scott had met Miss Belsches in the meantime. It may have been that he had received discouraging letters, it may have been that he had been refused an offered visit; it may have been that he had heard of the suit of William Forbes. It may have been a combination of two or all of these. There may somewhere be documentary evidence of what it was; but this has not come into my hands. This, however, is clear, that whatever it was Miss Cranstoun knew, and Scott, as will appear, discussed the matter with Miss Erskine at Perth.

## THE FLIGHT SOUTH

To return, however, to the two letters bearing upon Scott's autumn journey to the north. Setting the two letters—Scott's to Erskine from Aberdeen and Miss Cranstoun's to Scott at Montrose—side by side, we may consider the problem of Scott's movements. Upon Wednesday, 14th September, Scott is in Aberdeen. He is leaving next day; his movements are uncertain, but he will pass by Perth on his return. He means to make an approach to Fettercairn, but he has no engagement for a visit there. He may possibly have been expecting a letter either at Aberdeen or to find it awaiting him at Montrose. Otherwise he may have intended to call at Fettercairn, in hopes doubtless of an encouraging welcome, in passing south by the inland route towards Montrose. Or he may have intended to go to Montrose, where, as will be seen, there was a sheltering roof, and to ride over from there to Fettercairn.

Scott then was at Aberdeen upon Wednesday, 14th September. Upon Sunday, 18th September, as it would seem, he was at Kelso. Between these two dates the crisis of his life had happened, the crisis which, as he tells in his *Journal*, left a crack in his heart which he carried throughout life.

Of the events of the intervening days only one fact is known with certainty. Scott spent one night at

<sup>1</sup> On that day Erskine, who knew what had happened, wrote to Scott at Kelso, as will presently appear.

Montrose as the guest of Mr. James Mitchell, minister of the second charge of the parish. To explain this visit a short digression is necessary. In the autobiographical fragment which Lockhart prefixes to the *Life*, Scott states (i. 29):

My father did not trust our education solely to our High School lessons. We had a tutor at home, a young man of an excellent disposition and a laborious student. He was bred to the Kirk, but unfortunately took such a very strong turn to fanaticism, that he afterwards resigned an excellent living in a seaport town, merely because he could not persuade the mariners of the guilt of setting sail of a Sabbath, in which, by the bye, he was less likely to be successful, as, *coeteris paribus*, sailors, from an opinion that it is a fortunate omen, always choose to weigh anchor on that day. The calibre of this young man's understanding may be judged of by this anecdote; but in other respects, he was a faithful and active instructor; and from him chiefly I learned writing and arithmetic. I repeated to him my French lessons, and studied with him my themes in the classics, but not classically. I also acquired, by disputing with him (for this he readily permitted) some knowledge of school-divinity and church-history, and a great acquaintance in particular with the old books describing the early history of the Church of Scotland, the wars and sufferings of the Covenanters, and so forth.

The record of this worthy man as abridged from Scott's *Fasti* is as follows:

JAMES MITCHELL, born 1763. Edinburgh University. Licensed, Edinburgh, 1783. Became chaplain to Wilhelma, Lady Glenorchy. Ordained 1784 at South Shields. Presented and admitted to second charge,



Montrose, 1786. Married, 1791, Jean, daughter of Alexander Mollison, minister of the First Charge, Montrose, by whom he had three children. On account of certain local difficulties, chiefly "because he could not persuade the mariners of the guilt of setting sale of a Sabbath", he demitted his charge in 1805. He afterwards accepted charge of Scots congregation at Wooler and died there 1835. His clerical attainments were of a high order and whilst a divinity student he was tutor to Sir Walter Scott.

In his autobiographical fragment Scott attributes his knowledge of Scottish ecclesiastical history to his long discussions with Mitchell. As Mitchell went to South Shields in 1784 his tutorship of Scott must have terminated when Scott was thirteen. The historical and ecclesiastical discussions seem therefore to argue some precocity.

In regard to Scott's visit to Mitchell, Lockhart states (i. 239):

It was in the course of this tour that he spent a day or two at Montrose with his old tutor Mitchell, and astonished and grieved that worthy Presbyterian by his zeal about witches and fairies.

The "day or two at Montrose" is a mistake of Lockhart's. Scott spent one night with Mitchell, as appears in Mitchell's own account of the matter as quoted by Lockhart on another page (i. 112). Mitchell prepared a manuscript autobiography from which he allowed Lockhart to copy the paragraphs relating to Scott. The passage about the visit of Scott to Montrose is as follows:

When minister in the second charge of the Established Church at Montrose he paid me a visit, and spent a night with me—few visits have been more gratifying. He was then on his return from Aberdeen, where he, as an advocate, had attended the Court of Justiciary in its northern circuit. Nor was his attendance in this court his sole object: another, and perhaps the principal, was, as he stated to me, to collect in his excursion ancient ballads and traditional stories about fairies, witches, and ghosts. Such intelligence proved to me as an electrical shock; and I then sincerely regretted, so do I still, that Sir Walter's precious time was so much devoted to the *dulce*, rather than the *utile* of composition, and that his great talent should have been wasted on such subjects. At the same time I feel happy to qualify this censure, as I am generally given to understand that his Novels are of a more pure and unexceptionable nature than characterises writings of a similar description; while at the same time his pen has been occupied in the production of works of a better and nobler order. Impressed with the conviction that he would one day arrive at honour and influence in his native country, I endeavoured to improve the occasion of his visit to secure his patronage in behalf of the strict and evangelical party in the Church of Scotland, in exerting himself to induce patrons to grant to the Christian people liberty to elect their own pastors in cases of vacancy. His answer struck me much: it was—"Nay, nay, Mr. Mitchell, I'll not do that; for if that were to be done, I and the like of me would have no life with such as you"; from which I inferred he thought that, were the evangelical clergy to obtain the superiority, they would introduce such strictness of discipline as would not quadrate with the ideas of that party called *the moderate* in the Church of Scotland, whose views, I presume, Sir Walter had now adopted. Some, however, to whom I have mentioned

Sir Walter's reply, have suggested that I had misunderstood his meaning, and that what he said was not in earnest, but in jocularly and good-humour. This may be true, and certainly is a candid interpretation. As to the ideal beings already mentioned as the subject of his enquiries, my materials were too scanty to afford him much information.

Mitchell is in error in stating that Scott was returning from the Circuit Court at Aberdeen, though the error tends to confirm the suggestion that Scott had made the approaching Circuit Court a pretext for his visit to Aberdeen, and if he announced a probable visit to Mitchell before he went north, this may well explain how that idea lingered in Mitchell's mind. The Circuit Court was held upon the 16th, after Scott had left Aberdeen. Lord Reston was the judge, and there was only one case. Mr. Rae, the Depute Clerk of Justiciary, tells me that there is no trace in the records of Scott ever having attended a Circuit Court at Aberdeen, which tends to confirm the impression created by the letter to Erskine that this was Scott's first visit to that city. Mr. Mitchell's reference to fairies, witches, and ghosts tallies exactly with one sentence in the letter to Erskine.

The visit to Montrose relates itself to Fettercairn in three possible ways. Scott may have taken the inland road by Banchory, called at Fettercairn upon 15th September, been repulsed, or, at all events, not invited to stay, and then ridden on to Montrose. Otherwise he may have proceeded to Montrose, deposited his paraphernalia at Mr. Mitchell's, and

then ridden over to Fettercairn to call. Or finally he may have received a letter discouraging a visit to Fettercairn. In any view, whether Scott was in an agony of suspense or of despair he must have shown considerable fortitude in his intercourse with Mitchell and have been terribly bored by that good man.

### THE SISTERLY LETTER

The next letter throwing light upon the matter is a charming letter from Miss Erskine to Scott, which Lockhart prints (i. 246):

To WALTER SCOTT, Esq., Rosebank, Kelso.

*Monday evening.*

If it were not that etiquette and I were constantly at war, I should think myself very blameable in thus trespassing against one of its laws; but as it is long since I forswore its dominion, I have acquired a prescriptive right to act as I will—and I shall accordingly anticipate the station of a *matron* in addressing a *young man*.

I can express but a very, very little of what I feel, and shall ever feel, for your unintermitting friendship and attention. I have ever considered you as a brother, and shall *now* think myself entitled to make even larger claims on your confidence. Well do I remember the *dark* conference we lately held together! The intention of unfolding *my own* future fate was often at my lips.

I cannot tell you my distress at leaving this house, wherein I have enjoyed so much real happiness, and giving up the service of so gentle a master [her brother Will. Erskine], whose yoke was indeed easy. I will therefore only commend him to your care as the last bequest of Mary Ann Erskine, and conjure you to continue to

each other through all your pilgrimage as you have commenced it. May every happiness attend you! Adieu!

Your most sincere friend and sister,

M. A. E.

The first thing to remark about this letter is that (at all events as printed in Lockhart) the date, such as it is, is wrong. The letter was not written by Mary Anne Erskine upon "Monday evening", for by Monday evening Mary Anne Erskine was Mary Anne Campbell. Miss Erskine was married to Mr. Campbell upon Monday, 19th September 1796, as may be verified by an Edinburgh newspaper of the week and in other ways. Moreover, Erskine wrote something upon the back of the sheet, and in acknowledging Erskine's letter Scott refers to it as of the 18th.<sup>1</sup> Lockhart says (i. 246): "Erskine writes on the other page, 'The poems are gorgeous, but I have made no bargain with any bookseller. I have told M. & M.<sup>2</sup> that I wont be satisfied with indemnity but an offer must be made. They will be out before the end of the week.' " This is all that Lockhart gives, but not, I think, all that Erskine wrote.

Miss Erskine's letter seems to show that Scott, whom we left at Montrose upon Thursday, 15th September, was at Rosebank, Kelso, his uncle's house, over the week end, and that he had been informed of Miss Erskine's wedding, of which he was ignorant at Aberdeen, upon the 14th.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Manners & Miller, publishers, Edinburgh.



Accordingly, either Scott saw Erskine in passing south, or communications had passed between them, for not only had Scott been informed of the wedding, but as Scott assumes in a subsequent letter to Erskine, the first after his arrival at Kelso, Erskine had been apprised of what had happened in the north. Against the view that there had been an interview are the terms of Erskine's reference to the publication of the ballads, about which he is said to have been negotiating in London. If he met Scott, unless indeed the interview was overwhelmingly tragic, he would hardly have withheld the information that he had made no bargain with any bookseller. Moreover, Scott had no means of apprising Erskine of a projected sudden return south. An interview, therefore, suggests a call by Scott upon Erskine; but apparently Scott had not seen Miss Erskine, who resided with her brother in Edinburgh. Possibly Scott found awaiting him at Montrose a letter apprising him of the wedding, and replied explaining the distress that precluded his joining in any festivities.

Scott, who had spent the night of Thursday, 15th September, at Montrose, may have travelled south on Friday by the coach, which then made the journey to Edinburgh in a single day. Stout pony as Earwig may have been, I had doubts if it could have stayed the distance at the pace. But Sir Harry Hope, M.P., tells me that such a ride, 137 miles in two days, was quite possible in these days, when the roads were easy for cantering. On his way north

Scott seems to have covered quite sixty miles in one day, Perth to Benholm, by Dundee.

The final letter of the series is one written by Scott to Erskine upon 26th September 1796. The original of this letter, a copy of which I obtained from the late Mr. David Douglas, I have been unable to trace,<sup>1</sup> but the internal evidence of its authenticity is overwhelming.

### DOWN BUSY DEVIL, DOWN

*Scott to Erskine.*

Thy much esteemed favor of 18th inst., dear Willy, was this day followed up by a letter from Miller<sup>2</sup> on the important subject of the Ballads. In point of time the publishers are certainly entitled to dictate, and I do not know whether I may not admit their authority even as to the title-page, but that I take to be the *ne plus ultra* of a Bookseller's dominion. As to expressing in a preface feelings which I do not feel, apprehensions which I do not apprehend, and motives by which I am no whit moved, I hold it (so to speak) to be all Blarney, and therefore shall not indulge Mr. Mundell<sup>3</sup> by the insertion of any of these commonplace apologies for publication, which are, in fact, no apologies at all. Either the things are worthy the attention of the public or they are not. In the one case an apology would be superfluous, in the other impertinent; *sat est*.

I suppose of course the new married folks, now

<sup>1</sup> The letter was said by Mr. Douglas to be in the possession of Mr. Law, but I cannot find it among Mr. Law's correspondence bequeathed to the Scottish National Library.

<sup>2</sup> The publisher.

<sup>3</sup> The printer.

no longer bride and bridegroom,<sup>1</sup> are not distant from you. Where do you hang out? Are you to racket it hard in giving and receiving visits, etc? All this I long to know. I did not fail to drink on Monday an additional bumper to the happiness of a pair in whom I am so warmly interested, and ranged the whole country for an Edinburgh paper that I might have the pleasure of seeing their union announced in due form. The news was great pleasure to two of your neighbours whom I unexpectedly saw in the City of Kelso on their return from visiting the Lakes of Westmoreland. I mean the gentle shepherds Patie & Roger Ayton. The day being diabolical I had it not in my power to shew them the beauties of the place, and I could not even prevail upon them to visit Rosebank.

To return to a subject which is never long absent from my mind, I am not sure but your judgment may be more correct than mine in what regards X,<sup>2</sup> and therefore your sailing orders are, if the subject is casually introduced, to treat it lightly. Nobody can be surprised that such a Don Quixote as your friend should have a Dulcinea—you understand. I am satisfied Joan Ker<sup>3</sup> regarded it in that light, otherwise she would hardly have mentioned it. *Verbum sapienti*. Your sister's situation will in all probabilities give her an opportunity of getting acquainted with the lady in question. I am sure she will like her for her own sake, and I need not say how much I should be delighted to see a union take place between such kindred minds, in each of whom I take such interest, that is if nothing has occurred from the campaign of the

<sup>1</sup> Miss Erskine, as stated above, was married to Archibald Campbell of Clathick on 19th September 1796. Clathick is not very far from Crieff, to which Post Office Scott's letter was addressed.

<sup>2</sup> Doubtful initials.

<sup>3</sup> Probably a sister of Scott's friend Charles Kerr of Abbotrule.

formal chevalier and his son and heir Don Guglielmo. I endeavour to treat the recollection of this visit and its consequences with levity, and yet upon my soul, Dear Erskine, it requires an exertion to do it. Down busy Devil, down. But I run about the country and gallop over stock and stile after the "gude graca dogs" so that if Horace's *atra cura* insists upon riding the pillion, *sedere post equitem* [torn] as honest Flaccus has it, I must e'en do my best to drop her Jadeship into a Teviotdale Bog. I must not allow you to forget so good a habit as that of regular correspondence, so if a sugar plum will have any effect upon you I must inform you that your letters are one of the chief sources of amusement I have here, and that the more frequently you write the better you enable me to banish the blue devils and white, black devils and grey which insist upon being the companions of my solitude. A thousand compliments of congratulation to our friends if they are within reach of receiving them. We will all be busy ourselves in winter to look out for a fellow mind for you, and I have no doubt you will meet one.

Ever, dear Willy, ever thine,

WALTER SCOTT.

ROSEBANK, 26th Sept. 1796.

*Addressed*

William Erskine, Esq.,

Advocate,

Crieff.<sup>1</sup>

To be left at the Post Office till called for.

<sup>1</sup> Crieff, to which this letter was addressed, was in a sense Erskine's home country, for his deceased father had been an Episcopalian

The letter of Erskine of the 18th, of which the foregoing is an acknowledgment, was no doubt the writing on the back of the sheet upon which Miss Erskine's letter was written. This writing of Erskine's appears to have contained a good deal more than the passage which Lockhart quotes. The allusion in Scott's letter to the gossip about Scott's disappointment in love is obscure. But the point seems to be this. Some gossip about the matter was current which Scott desired to check. The devotion of Don Quixote to Dulcinea del Toboso was chivalric and factitious. Scott desired that the same impression should be created in regard to his relations with Miss Belsches—that there had been nothing serious in it. The allusion to the possible opportunities which Miss Erskine's marriage would give her of meeting Miss Belsches perhaps refers to the comparative vicinity of Clathick to Invermay, the residence of Miss Belsches' relatives. The reference to the campaign of "the formal chevalier and his son Don Guglielmo" is interesting and yet perplexing. These are the only words of Scott about the affair or about the Forbeses in which there is a suggestion of bitterness. But the reference is peculiar. All the evidence would seem to suggest that the cloud which overshadowed Scott's prospects must even from his own point of view have been the advances of William

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clergyman at Crieff. Parental episcopacy, however, seems to have sat somewhat lightly upon Erskine, for he was in after years an elder of the Church of Scotland (Saline, 1802) and was a member of the General Assembly on at least six occasions.



Forbes and the favour with which they were reported to be receiving. This letter seems to negative this aspect of the matter. William Forbes had the field before him, but, as Scott thought, his success was problematical. It was not in Scott's view the preference for him that had driven Scott out of the field. Scott had been rejected upon his own. But he had no quarrel with the lady. She was a kindred soul to Erskine's sister, for whom Scott had warm admiration and affection.

The letter, however, seems to show that, though, so far as Scott knew, William Forbes was not the cause, there had been some rejection, some change in the *status quo* of hope not forbidden but circumspection enjoined. His affair was at an end, though he still retained the strongest regard and admiration for the lady.

But whilst negative of the idea that Scott deemed that Forbes had supplanted him or "cut him out", the letter perhaps suggests some clash of an awkward and perhaps somewhat ludicrous nature between Scott's expedition towards Fettercairn and a visit there of the Forbes, father and son.

To sum up the matter dealt with in this chapter. The probability appears to be that Scott wrote to Fettercairn from Aberdeen announcing his proposed stay in that part of the country—the Montrose-Dunnottar district,—in search of folklore, etc., that he did so in the hope of an invitation to Fettercairn, and that at Montrose he received a decisively dis-

couraging reply and immediately started for the south. About the same time he heard of an expedition to Fettercairn of Sir William Forbes and his son, who may indeed have alighted from the stage-coach at Montrose *en route* for Fettercairn. Such is the inference as regards Scott's movements which I draw from the documents. Against it may be set a tradition mentioned by the late Rev. George Gilfillan of a headlong ride of Scott from Fettercairn to Montrose after his rejection.<sup>1</sup> But in any case Scott does not appear to have visited Fettercairn upon this occasion, in the sense of staying there for one or two nights. If he went there at all he got his congé, whether metaphorically or literally on the door step. The exigencies of time in relation to the documents seem to negative any other theory.

Lord Clinton has very kindly looked into the contemporary documents preserved at Fettercairn, but he has found no reference to a visit of Scott in September 1796.

The Kelso letter plainly imports that Scott had received a definite rebuff at or from Fettercairn. He was off. But he did not take it as by any means sure that William Forbes was on. This suggests the question, Did any faint, lingering hope still remain? The terms of the letter seem to leave one in doubt upon this matter.

<sup>1</sup> Mitchell's account does not suggest such a panic arrival. It may be that the origin of the tradition was a headlong ride not *to* but *from* Montrose.

## CHAPTER V

### “LENORE”

THE translation of Bürger's "Lenore" plays a part in the story of Scott's first love. But the matter is confused and obscure, and as it would have been too much of a digression to have introduced this episode into the story of the "Congé" journey, I have reserved it for a separate short chapter.

### SCHLOSS HAINFELD

Jane Anne Cranstoun married in 1797 Count von Purgstall, an Austrian nobleman and soldier. He died in 1811 and an only son<sup>1</sup> did not survive him long, but the Countess continued to reside for the rest of her life at Schloss Hainfeld in Styria—a somewhat pathetic figure, a saddened woman wrapt up in memories of her husband and son and clinging with affectionate loyalty to her exile from her native land. In 1834–35 she was visited by Captain Basil Hall, R.N., and his wife. The visit was a long one and ended tragically in the death of the Countess upon 23rd March 1835. In 1836, Captain Hall published

<sup>1</sup> There was also a daughter who died in infancy.

an account of his visit and of the later years of the Countess's life under the title of *Schloss Hainfeld*. This work was in Lockhart's hands before the publication of the *Life* in 1837. Lockhart uses the story there told in regard to “Lenore”. But it is better to go to the original in Hall, which is as follows:

This intimacy led Sir Walter, very early in life, to consult Miss Cranstoun about his literary productions, respecting which it appears that he, with the usual diffidence of genius and powers unexercised, felt extremely distrustful. Fortunately, he met not only with sympathy and encouragement, but with solid counsel, from a congenial mind, whose sagacity penetrated much sooner than the rest of the world through the modest veil which concealed these talents destined so soon to command universal attention.

There was nothing, however, of a more tender sentiment between them, and while her interest in him arose entirely from an early appreciation of his great capacity, and the unrivalled sweetness of his disposition, his thoughts and his feelings were pointed, with her entire approbation, in quite another direction.

Unfortunately, the lady to whom he was attached discouraged his suit, or, at all events, her family did, and in his distress he naturally made Miss Cranstoun his confidante and he found in her both sympathy and assistance. Her co-operation on this occasion, it is true, led eventually to nothing, so far as the immediate object aimed at was concerned, but it furnished, accidentally, an interesting, and perhaps an important incident in the literary history of the humble youth, who, while his generous friend shortly afterwards banished herself, and was lost sight of, speedily rose to be the legitimate monarch of modern literature.

About the year 1793, Bürger's extraordinary poem of *Leonora* found its way to Scotland, and it happened that a translation of it was read at Dugald Stewart's, I think by Mrs. Barbauld. Miss Cranstoun described this strange work to her friend, the young poet, whose imagination was set on fire by the strange crowd of wild images and novel situations in this singular production. He never rested till, by the help of a German dictionary, he contrived to study it in the original, and she, as usual, encouraged him to persevere, and at the end of a few weeks' application to the German language he had made out the sense, and had himself written a poetical translation of that poem.

One morning at half-past six Miss Cranstoun was aroused by her maid, who said Mr. Scott was in the dining room and wished to speak with her immediately. She dressed in a great hurry and hastened down-stairs, wondering what he could have to say to her at that early hour. He met her at the door, and holding up his manuscript, eagerly begged her to listen to his poem. Of course she gave it all attention, and having duly praised it, she sent him away quite happy, after begging permission to retain the poem for a day or two in order to look it over more carefully. He said she might keep it till he returned from the country, where he was about to proceed on a visit to the house where the lady to whom he was attached was residing.

His friendly critic was already aware of this intended visit, and an idea having suggested itself to her during his animated perusal of the poem, she lost no time in putting it into execution. As soon as he was gone, she sent for their common friend, Mr. William Erskine, afterward Lord Kinnedder, and confided her scheme to him, of which he fully approved. The confederates then sallied forth to put their plan in train, and having repaired to Mr. Robert Miller the Bookseller, they soon



arranged with him to print a few copies of the new translation of “Lenore”, one of which was to be thrown off on the finest paper, and bound in the most elegant style.

In a few days the book was ready, and care being taken to despatch it, addressed to Mr. Scott, so that it should arrive at what was deemed the most propitious moment, it was placed in the poet’s hands just as the company were assembled round the tea-table after dinner.

Much curiosity was expressed by the party—the fair lady inclusive—as the splendid little volume gradually escaped from its folds, and displayed itself to the astonished eyes of the author, who, for the first time, saw himself in print—and who, all unconscious of the glories which awaited him, had possibly never dreamed of appearing in such a dress.

Concealment was out of the question, and he was called upon by the unanimous acclamation of the party, to read the poem, of which, as it happened, none of them had ever heard even the name.

Those who have enjoyed the surpassing delight of hearing Sir Walter Scott read poetry, will easily understand the effect which this recitation of his own earliest printed work, under the excitement of such a moment, must have produced. Indeed the only matter of astonishment is, how any simple maiden’s heart could have resisted this first wave of the great magician’s wand—destined so soon to interest all mankind.

But so it was, and the only lasting effect of this little plot was to increase the intimacy between the young author and his friendly critic.

### LOCKHART’S VERSION

I shall deal with what bears directly upon the love story when I have given Lockhart’s version, but as

so much turns upon accuracy of recollection in regard to an old story told at second-hand, I point out two apparent inaccuracies at the outset in the story of "Lenore" as told by Captain Hall. He states that Scott's introduction to "Lenore" was about 1793. As appears below it was at least two years later. The study by the aid of a German dictionary and "a few weeks' application to the German language" do not accord with the fact that Scott began the study of German in 1792 and by 1795 was already familiar with German poetry in the original. The last sentence of Captain Hall's account, viz. the increase of the intimacy between Scott and Miss Cranstoun, suggests a further criticism. In such a narrative what might be supposed by the narrator readily slips in. The intimacy between Scott and Miss Cranstoun could hardly have been made closer by the "Lenore" incident than it already was, and it terminated, save for occasional correspondence, very shortly afterwards when she left the country on her marriage to Count von Purgstall. To turn now, however, to Lockhart's version of the story (i. 235).

It must, I think, have been, while he was indulging his vagabond vein, during the autumn of 1794<sup>1</sup> that Miss Aitken (afterwards Mrs. Barbauld) paid her visit to Edinburgh, and entertained a party at Mr. Dugald Stewart's by reading Mr. Taylor's then unpublished version of Bürger's "Lenore". In the essay on Imitation of Popular Poetry, the reader has a full account of the

<sup>1</sup> The context shows that this is a mistake for 1795; indeed it is corrected in later editions.

interest with which Scott heard, some weeks afterwards, a friend's imperfect recollections of this performance; the anxiety with which he sought after a copy of the original German; the delight with which he at length perused it; and how, having just been reading the specimens of ballad poetry introduced into Lewis's *Romance of The Monk*, he called to mind the early facility of versification which had lain so long in abeyance, and ventured to promise his friend a rhymed translation of “Lenore” from his own pen. The friend in question was Miss Cranstoun, afterwards Countess of Purgstall, the sister of his friend George Cranstoun, now Lord Corehouse. He began the task, he tells us, after supper, and did not retire to bed until he had finished it, having by that time worked himself into a state of excitement which set sleep at defiance.

Next morning before breakfast he carried his MS. to Miss Cranstoun, who was not only delighted but astonished at it; for I have seen a letter of hers to a mutual friend in the country, in which she says: “Upon my word, Walter Scott is going to turn out a poet—something of a cross, I think, between Burns and Gray”.

. . . . .

All this occurred in the beginning of April 1796. A few days afterwards, Scott went to pay a visit at a country house, where he expected to meet “the lady of his love”. Jane Anne Cranstoun was in the secret of his attachment, and knew that, however doubtful might be Miss ——'s feeling on that subject, she had a high admiration of Scott's abilities, and often corresponded with him on literary matters; so, after he had left Edinburgh, it occurred to her that she might perhaps forward his views in this quarter, by presenting him in the character of a printed author. William Erskine being called in to

her counsels, a few copies of the ballad were forthwith thrown off in the most elegant style, and one, richly bound and blazoned, followed Scott in the course of a few days to the country. The verses were read and approved of, and Miss Cranstoun at least flattered herself that he had not made his first appearance in types to no purpose.

Lockhart places the start of the story of "Lenore" at the party at Dugald Stewart's as during the autumn of 1795. He then relates certain events and winds up with "All this occurred in the beginning of April 1796". In regard to Miss Cranstoun's intervention, it is clear, I think, that Lockhart's sole source of information was Captain Basil Hall's work. In a footnote he says: "The story was told by the Countess of Purgstall on her death-bed to Captain Basil Hall". Lockhart, however, omits that part of the story dealing with Scott's acquisition of German in order to read "Lenore" in the original, which Lockhart knew not to be accurate. In Captain Basil Hall's account it is stated that Scott said, "She might keep the copy of the verses till he returned from the country, where he was about to proceed on a visit to the house where the lady to whom he was attached was residing". This undoubtedly refers to Fettercairn, where Miss Belsches then resided for the greater part of the year at all events, and where she was both in April and in August 1796. Lockhart, who apparently knew nothing about Scott's visit to the north and to Fettercairn in April 1796, alters the phraseology—"A few days afterwards Scott went to pay a visit at

a country house where he expected to meet the ‘lady of his love’ ”.

There can be no doubt that if the story is accurately told, the copy of “Lenore” must have been sent to Scott at Fettercairn in April 1796. But the story seems to involve several improbabilities. Miss Cranstoun must have had the poem printed off without giving Scott an opportunity to correct the proof sheets—a daring proceeding even if she did not realise how freely Scott alters both in manuscript and proofs. Moreover, as Scott’s visit was short, she, or rather the printers, must have shown extraordinary expedition to have the work set up, corrected, sent to press, and handsomely bound and duly despatched in the course of a few days.

That Miss Cranstoun was a party to having the work printed need not be doubted, or that there was a conspiracy that Scott should carry it as a recommendation to Fettercairn. I place the incident, however, in August, not in April, 1796.

#### MISS CRANSTOUN’S IMPRESSIONS

Scott, as mentioned in Chapter IV., appears to have got advance copies of the work when he was at Cambusmore on his way north towards the end of August. He presented a copy to Lady Charlotte Home<sup>1</sup> upon 26th August. This copy, a thin quarto, I have

<sup>1</sup> Daughter of the 9th Earl of Home and afterwards wife of the Ven. Charles Baillie Hamilton. She survived till 1866, and is still remembered.



had in my hands. It seems unlikely that Scott set out from Edinburgh burdened with a supply of a work printed in April. This view of the matter seems to be confirmed by a statement of Erskine in his letter to Scott of 18th September: "The poems are gorgeous". Erskine had not seen them in print before he left Edinburgh in July or early in August. The statement—"The poems are gorgeous" would have been meaningless of poems which Erskine had seen in print in April. If this view accords with what took place, the moving reading at Fettercairn is probably what was meant to happen but did not happen. The countess's memory may well have deceived her, or Captain Hall may have filled in the story. Miss Cranstoun as a female confidante was probably the person who had the most intimate knowledge of the love affair. There is a significant sentence in the account which upon her death-bed, thirty-nine years later, she gave to Captain Basil Hall: "Unfortunately the lady to whom he was attached discouraged his suit, or at all events her family did, and in his distress he naturally made Miss Cranstoun his confidant, and he found in her both sympathy and assistance." Indefinite as is this statement in regard to the lady's attitude, it conveys a definite impression as to what lingered in the confidante's memory. The family, as it was thought, did not encourage the suit, but this discouragement was not counteracted by any strong devotion on the part of the lady. All might have gone well perhaps had the family been complaisant, but

that was not the only doubt or difficulty. The lady did not quite know her own mind. This impression resting in the memory of the confidante after all these years appears to be confirmed by the extant contemporary letters printed or referred to in this work. Scott's letters to Erskine from Aberdeen and Kelso, and Miss Cranstoun's letter to Scott at Montrose, are not readily referable to the case of two devoted lovers with no barrier between them other than the absence in the meantime of parental consent.

The impression is confirmed by the story of “Lenore” as retailed through Captain Hall. If the only obstacle to be overcome was the opposition of the parents, why should Miss Cranstoun have been so anxious to move the young lady by the translations of German ballads—productions hardly likely to reconcile the stolid father? Why should wonder be expressed that the reading of it by Scott at Fettercairn (apocryphal as that incident may have been) did not melt the lady's heart? So much at all events seems clear. Countess von Purgstall, who, as already stated, knew as much about the matter from the inside as anybody, did not lead Captain Hall to believe that Scott's case was that of the Bride of Lammermoor, that a lady deeply in love with one man was constrained by her parents to marry another.

The translation of Burger's ballads, “Lenore” and “The Wild Huntsman”, by Walter Scott, was published in October 1796. The work bears to be “Printed by Mundell and Son, Royal Bank Close, for Manners

and Miller, Parliament Square, and sold by Cadell, Jun., and W. Davies (successors to Mr. Cadell) in the Strand, London.”

The reference to the London booksellers explains Erskine's statement on his return from London that he had made no bargain with the booksellers, albeit, as it appears, he was negotiating on the matter in London. It also explains what might seem otherwise puzzling, how there were negotiations in London about a work which was being published by Edinburgh publishers. At that time in connection with such a publication antecedent arrangements were made by the author with booksellers as well as with a publisher. There can, I think, be little doubt but that what happened was that towards the end of August one of the advance copies was sent to Erskine, who was then in London, and this led to the negotiations with the booksellers there.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SEQUEL

#### THE BROKEN HEART

IN his Journal Scott chronicles two years of a broken heart. This is puzzling, for only some eleven months elapsed between the finale of his courtship of Miss Belsches and his engagement to Miss Carpenter. But again in the Journal he speaks of three years of dreaming and *two* of wakening. The "two years" was not then just a slip. Somehow two years were fixed in Scott's mind in connection with his disappointed hopes. One may conjecture that the two years commenced to run towards the close of 1795, when Scott, who had now declared himself by letter to Miss Belsches, began to doubt whether she fully reciprocated his sentiments. But, be that as it may, the period of the broken heart cannot, for the purposes of this chapter, be taken as having endured for more than one year—the year from the autumn of 1796 to that of 1797, when Scott became engaged to Miss Carpenter. In Lockhart, who, as has been seen, takes it that Scott had "digested" his agony during a tour in the Highlands (which never took place),

there is no trace of this year of a broken heart. On the contrary, he represents this year as one of the brightest and fullest of Scott's life.

The engagement of William Forbes and Miss Belsches was announced early in October. Scott must have been at Kelso when he heard of it, for he did not return to Edinburgh until November, the month when at that time the sittings of the Court were resumed. In the coach on the journey from Kelso to Edinburgh his conversation with James Ballantyne was so lively and spirited that it delighted a Quaker who became the prototype of Joshua in *Redgauntlet*. The succeeding months had many interests. Scott was in frequent communication with a new acquaintance, his kinsman's highly born bride, Mrs. Scott of Harden. He busied himself with translations from the German, and with other studies of which he has left a record. But, above all, he devoted an immense deal of time and trouble to the organisation of a Regiment of Volunteer Horse for the defence of the country, a force in which his successful rival, William Forbes, was a brother officer. Lockhart's record, however, notwithstanding, we must, I think, prefer the evidence of the Journal, and conclude that amid all the activities of the year Scott carried a sorely wounded spirit. The two letters published in this work confirm the tradition and the testimony of the Journal to the severity of the trial.



## THE HEART HANDSOMELY PIECED

In August 1797, in the course of a tour in the English Lake district in company with his brother John and his friend Adam Fergusson, Scott met Miss Charlotte Carpenter, the orphan daughter of a French Royalist and his Huguenot wife. The later part of the young lady's education had been acquired in England, whither her mother after her father's death carried her and her brother to escape the Revolution storm. The parties seem to have been mutually attracted by each other, and in the course of a week or two an engagement of marriage, or, at all events, a provisional engagement, was entered into between them. In view of Scott's recent experience it seems not unfair to number him among those who were "caught on the rebound". But in this there was nothing amiss. Many a happy marriage has followed a catching upon the rebound.

The lady who attracted Scott and became his wife is thus described by Lockhart: (i. 266).

Without the features of a regular beauty, she was rich in personal attractions; "a form that was fashioned as light as a fay's"; a complexion of the clearest and lightest olive; eyes large, deep-set and dazzling, of the finest Italian brown; and a profusion of silken tresses, black as the raven's wing; her address hovering between the reserve of a pretty young Englishwoman who has not mingled largely in general society, and a certain natural archness and gaiety that suited well with the accompaniment of a French accent. A lovelier vision, as all who

remember her in the bloom of her days have assured me, could hardly have been imagined.

If one is to be guided by portraits, the son-in-law has not understated the physical charms of the lady. Indeed the fiancé's account is much more modest. Writing to his aunt, Miss C. Rutherford, with the announcement of his engagement, Scott says:

She is *not a beauty by any means*, but her person and face are very engaging. She is a brunette—her manners are lively, but when necessary she can be very serious.

Scott made no secret to Miss Carpenter of his early and blighted affections. In one of his letters to her he wrote:

The feelings I entertain for you have ever been strangers to my bosom *except during a period I have often alluded to*.<sup>1</sup>

And in another letter he refers to:

Hitherto from reasons which have long thrown a laxitude over my mind, my professional exertions have been culpably neglected.

In writing to his mother announcing his engagement Scott says:

I cannot express to you the anxiety I have that you will not think me flighty and inconsiderate in this business. Believe me that experience in one instance—you cannot fail to know to what I allude—is too recent to permit my being so hasty in my conclusions as the warmth of my temper might have otherwise prompted.

<sup>1</sup> This tends to confirm the doubts expressed in Chapter II. as to the accepted idea of an attachment from boyhood.

One might suppose that what Scott here sought to deprecate was the suggestion that he did not know his own mind, but in the light of his earlier experience it must rather have been that he did not really know the lady's mind and was again the victim of "self-deception".

It is not within the scope of this work to give any account of Scott's courtship and marriage. The only matter relevant to his first love in relation to his marriage is the suggestion that Scott cherished throughout his married life a conviction that this was only second best, that he always carried with him wistful memories and fond regrets which clouded his matrimonial life and chilled his marital affections. There are, as I think, no good grounds for any such suggestion. Scott was a loyal and affectionate husband and Mrs. Scott was a loving and attentive wife, wholly devoted to her husband and with complete confidence in him.

Lockhart (vii. 410) gives a charming account of the domestic relations of the Scott family.

If ever the principle of kindness was incarnated in a mere man it was in him, and real kindness can never be but modest. In the social relations of life, where men are most effectually tried, no spot can be found in him. He was a patient, dutiful, reverent son; a generous, compassionate, tender husband; an honest, careful and most affectionate father. Never was a more virtuous or a happier fireside than his. The influence of his mighty genius overshadowed it imperceptibly; his calm good sense and his angelic sweetness of heart and

temper regulated and softened a strict but paternal discipline. His children as they grew up understood by degrees the high privilege of their birth: but the profoundest sense of his greatness never disturbed their confidence in his goodness. The buoyant play of his spirits made him sit young among the young; parent and son seemed to live in brotherhood together: and the chivalry of his imagination threw a certain air of courteous gallantry into his relations with his daughters, which gave a very peculiar grace to the fondness of their intercourse. Though there could not be a gentler mother than Lady Scott, on those delicate occasions most interesting to young ladies, they always made their father the first confidant.

No! Such a husband and such a father was not nursing a blighted affection.

#### LADY SCOTT

Injustice has been done to Lady Scott by some of the minor biographers of Scott and commentators upon his career. His marriage to her has been represented as a marriage of mere convenience by one who had already drunk the dregs of love—a marriage which turned out just as well as could be expected of such a union. Lady Scott has been represented as an unsympathetic and unsuitable wife for Walter Scott, a flighty, vain woman. There can be no doubt that Lady Scott did not share in full measure her husband's tastes or his intellectual interests. She was not a Scotswoman, and she was not endowed with a historical imagination. Further, whilst Scott was simple and homely in his tastes, Lady Scott was

somewhat prone to ostentation and had a lively sense of the dignity and importance of her position as the wife of Walter Scott. But this is the worst that can be said. Lady Scott was a devoted wife and mother, inspired with constant solicitude for the comfort and happiness of her husband, and whatever intellectual disparity or divergence of tastes there may have been between them, domestic affection was never disturbed far less alienated.

It may be that Lady Scott was not the wife whom the world, or even his own friends, would have chosen for Scott. But it was Scott's business to choose his wife. It was a wise though cautious answer of the shrewd old father of a distinguished Scotsman of last generation who, when inquiry was made as to his son's bride, replied, "Weel, an' she pleases him".

The references to his sense of loss and desolation in the *Journal* upon Lady Scott's death afford ample testimony to the depth of Scott's marital affection. From a number I select the following. Under the date of Lady Scott's funeral he refers to the coffin:

containing the creature that was so long the dearest on earth to me.

A day or two later, speaking of his own room, he says:

The solitude seemed so absolute. My poor Charlotte would have been in my room half a score of times to see if the fire burned and to ask a hundred kind questions.

A week or two later, when he had an attack of headache, he writes:



I have often deserved a headache in my young days without having one, and nature, I suppose, is paying off old scores. Aye, but then the want of the affectionate care that used to be ready with lowered voice and stealthy pace to smooth the pillow, and offer condolence and assistance—gone—gone—for ever—ever—ever. Well, there is another world, and we'll meet free from the mortal sorrows and frailties that beset us here.

Two years later Scott visited Carlisle Cathedral, because, as his daughter, Miss Anne Scott, wrote: "He said he must stand once more on the spot where he married poor mamma". In regard to this visit Scott makes the following entry under date 3rd April 1828:

Here I married poor Charlotte. She is gone and I am following faster perhaps than I wot of. It is something to have lived and loved, and our poor children are so hopeful and affectionate that it chastens the sadness attending the thoughts of our separation.

#### SIR WILLIAM AND LADY FORBES

The marriage of William Forbes and Williamina Belsches was celebrated upon 19th January 1797, some three months after the announcement of the engagement which finally extinguished Scott's hopes. The marriage was an exceedingly happy one. William Forbes busied himself with the conduct of the business of the bank in Edinburgh. For a number of years the couple resided at the Dean House, and later at Colinton. But Forbes appears to have had

also a house in George Street, where they sometimes resided. On the death of his father in 1806 he succeeded to the baronetcy and the family estates. Six children were born of the marriage, of whom the youngest, James David, became a distinguished physicist, and, after a tenure of the Chair of Natural Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, he was for a number of years Principal of the United College at St. Andrews.<sup>1</sup> After the birth of this child, on 20th April 1809, the health of Lady Forbes declined, and she died in Devonshire upon 5th December 1810. The death of this charming and beloved young wife and mother was deemed a social tragedy in the Edinburgh of the time.

#### THE ALOOFNESS

The references to Lady Jane Stuart show that though there was no open quarrel there was a complete breach of intercourse of any kind between Scott and the Belsches-Stuart family. There is a certain mystery in this matter. That intimacy or even any intercourse should cease for a time is understandable. But high-minded people, and they were such on both sides here, reconcile themselves to situations, and though there may be a certain embarrassment in the first rencontre, they adapt themselves to the conventions of ordinary acquaintance. The matter would be quite understandable if there had been a

<sup>1</sup> Life, by Principal Campbell Shairp.

quarrel between William Forbes and Scott. But, on the contrary, their relations were of the most cordial character. Doubtless, after their daughter's marriage, Sir John and Lady Jane do not appear to have had a permanent residence in Edinburgh. But as one of the Barons of Exchequer, Sir John, after he retired from Parliament, must have been a good deal in Edinburgh. Be this as it may, it seems clear that between Sir John and Lady Jane Stuart and the young man who had been so much about their house in Edinburgh and been entertained as a guest in their country mansion, and whose subsequent career Lady Jane had always followed "with a mother's love", there was no intercourse whatever after the marriage of their daughter. But what of the young lady herself—Mrs. William (after 1806, Lady) Forbes? It is commonly represented that after the rupture Williamina Belsches disappeared completely from Scott's life and even his ken; that he never saw her again. The usual explanation is that she resided almost entirely in a remote part of the country. But, as has been shown, this is quite a mistake. Her ordinary place of residence was in Edinburgh with her husband. For some time she was resident in George Street, almost round the corner from Scott's house in Castle Street. Scott must, it is thought, have met the lady not infrequently in the street and also at social functions, public or private. Scott, indeed, states in a passage from his *Journal* that he did not see very much of Sir William Forbes "by his retiring

into the bosom of his family and I moving little beyond mine". This suggests that, as was not unnatural, there was no intimacy between the families. But the absence even of a conventional acquaintanceship between the Scotts and the Forbeses, other than Scott's acquaintance with Forbes, would seem to imply acknowledgment of a rupture of a painful character. Scott was never at any time engaged to Miss Belsches. Society was not supposed to know anything about the matter, and there is evidence that beyond the little circle of Scott's confidants there had not been more than very vague gossip about an attachment. If there was a complete breach even of conventional acquaintance between Scott and the wife of his friend, who must at all events have known of the former intimate acquaintance of Scott with his wife and her family, this would seem to imply some recognition by Forbes of what one of the greatest living authorities upon Scott has described to me as an "element of mystery in the affair which Lockhart glosses over and which has never been elucidated". It may be, however, that the complete breach of acquaintance is as mythical as the reason assigned for it, the lady's absence from Edinburgh. The apparently complete estrangement, however, from the lady's mother, who must have been a good deal with the daughter, supports the view that any intercourse after their respective marriages between Scott and Mrs. Forbes must have been of a very slight and formal character. Mrs. Scott's attitude

may have been a factor, but it would not be fair to draw that lady in merely on vague conjecture.

### THE "HIGH SPIRITED NOBLE FELLOW"

Sir William Forbes did not marry again, but he continued to reside in Scotland, dividing his attention between his family estates and the business of the bank in Edinburgh. He died upon 24th October 1828, at the comparatively early age of 55.<sup>1</sup> Scott, who was his senior by two years, survived him by four years. Accordingly, Scott was the last survivor of the trio whose history was so strangely linked.

Throughout life Scott and Forbes were friends. No lingering sense of disappointment or of jealousy seems to have clouded Scott's relations with his successful rival.

Under date 20th January 1826, Scott writes in his Journal:

Sir William Forbes called—the same kind honest friend as ever, with all offers of assistance, &c. All anxious to serve me and careless about their own risk of loss. And these are the cold hard money-making men whose questions and control I apprehend!

<sup>1</sup> Upon the death of Lady Forbes the right to the Wishart baronetcy devolved upon her eldest son, William, who became a captain in the army, but predeceased his father, dying in 1826. Thereafter the right to the baronetcy devolved upon the second son, John Stuart. Neither William nor John Stuart during their father's lifetime seem to have assumed the dignity. On the death of Sir William, John Stuart Forbes succeeded to the Forbes baronetcy. As Sir John left one daughter but no son, the right to the Wishart baronetcy was severed from that of Forbes, and it seems now to be vested in Sir John's grandson, the 21st Baron Clinton.





SIR WILLIAM FORBES  
OF PITSLIGO



Again, upon 26th January, referring to a meeting of his creditors, Scott records:

Gibson came with a joyful face announcing all the creditors had unanimously agreed to a private trust. This is handsome and confidential and must warm my best efforts to get them out of the scrape. I will not doubt—to doubt is to lose. Sir William Forbes took the chair and behaved, as he has ever done, with the generosity of ancient faith and early friendship. They (Sir William Forbes & Co.'s Banking House) are deeper concerned than most. In what scenes have Sir William and I not borne share together—desperate and almost bloody affrays, revelries, deep-drinking matches, and finally with the kindest feeling on both sides somewhat separated by his retiring much within the bosom of his family and I moving little beyond mine. It is fated our planets should cross though, and that at the periods most interesting for me. Down—down—a hundred thoughts.

The statement, accepted by Scott, that all the creditors had agreed to a private trust deed, was not quite accurate. One creditor for £2000, a Jew named Abud, held out and would have imprisoned Scott. To avoid this Sir William Forbes himself paid the Jew £2000 and acquired the debt as an ordinary creditor. Scott knew nothing of this until after Sir William's death, as Sir William himself took care that it should not be disclosed to Scott.

Again, upon 6th November 1827, there is the following entry in the Journal:

Sir William Forbes came in before dinner to me high

spirited noble fellow as ever and true to his friend. Agrees with my feelings to a comma.<sup>1</sup>

Sir William Forbes died, as already mentioned, upon 24th October 1828. There is a blank of several months at this period in Scott's Journal, so the death is not referred to. But in a letter to Sir Alexander Wood, dated Abbotsford, October 28, 1828, Scott, on hearing of the death of his early friend, thus writes:

Your letter brought me the afflicting intelligence of the death of our early and beloved friend Sir William. I had little else to expect from the state of health in which he was when I last saw him: but that circumstance does not diminish the pain with which I now reflect I shall never see him more. He was a man who from his habits could not be intimately known to many, although everything which he did partook of that high feeling and generosity which belongs perhaps to a better age than that we live in. In him I feel I have sustained a loss which no after years of my life can fill up to me, and if I look back to the gay and happy hours of youth, they must be filled with recollections of our departed friend. In the whole course of life our friendship has been uninterrupted, as his kindness has been unwearied. Even the last time I saw him (so changed from what I knew him), he came to town when he was fitter to have kept his room, merely because he could be of service to some affairs of mine. It is most melancholy to reflect that the life of a man whose principles were so excellent and

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the words preceding the entry and referring to the same day are "I waited on L. J. S. ; an affecting meeting". See p. 38. Scott wept with Lady Jane over the memory of his lost love and crossed the street to give an affectionate greeting to his successful rival.

his heart so affectionate should have in the midst of external prosperity been darkened, and I fear I may say shortened, by domestic affliction. But "those whom He loveth He chasteneth". And the o'er seeing Providence whose ways are as just and kind as they are inscrutable, has given us in the fate of our dear friend an example that we must look to a better world for the reward of sound religion, active patriotism and extended benevolence. I need not write more to you on this subject: you must feel the loss more keenly than anyone. But there "is another and a better world", in which I trust in God those who have loved each other in this transitory scene may meet and recognize the friends of youth and companions of more advanced years.

The ashes of Scott's dead love can claim no more appropriate monument than the noble tribute to his successful rival.

Whether or not anybody was to blame for Scott's early disappointment in love, it seems clear that Scott never harboured a thought that his rival was in any way to blame. Whatever may have happened, William Forbes did not come between Scott and a lady whom Forbes believed to have given her affections to Scott or pledged her troth to him.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE AFTERMATH

THE traces of Scott's early attachment in his published works have been a theme of much discussion. There are three or perhaps four different aspects of the matter which should not be confused. There is the search for what may be deemed deliberate recreations of some matter of description, of sentiment, or of detail. Again there are circumstances which bear such a degree of resemblance to those in which Scott was placed, that without any deliberate attempt at re-creation his own story must have been present to his mind. Then again all that was written by Scott was written by one who had loved intensely and had known the bitterness of disappointment. Much as has been written about Venice, a description of a scene in Venice in a tale is more "convincing" if one knows that the writer has himself stood beneath the shadow of St. Mark's. Notwithstanding all the scorn of the rejected suitor of Locksley Hall, Amy must have been better able to understand and sympathise with her daughter in as much as "She herself was not exempt. Truly she

herself had suffered." So accounts of love affairs by Scott are more satisfying and are read with more conviction than hectic descriptions of London life by a female school teacher in Aberdeenshire! Finally, there is the influence of this early disappointment upon Scott's temperament and spirit.

All these matters afford subject of discussion upon a scale which will not be attempted here. But the record which these pages contain of the facts would seem to be incomplete without some reference to the consequences.

### THE VERSE OF THE HOUR

The first thing one looks for is contemporary literature in prose or verse of the courtship and the disappointment. Here, apart from a few references in letters which have already been quoted, the materials are exceedingly scanty. Lockhart concludes his account of the love affair with the following passage (i. 242):

Talking of this story with Lord Kinnedder, I once asked him whether Scott never made it the subject of verses at the period. His own confession, that even during the time when (on emerging from boyhood) he had laid aside the habit of versification, he did sometimes commit "a sonnet on a mistress's eyebrow", had not then appeared. Lord Kinnedder answered, "O yes, he made many little stanzas about the lady, and he sometimes shewed them to Cranstoun, Clerk, and myself—but we really thought them in general very poor. Two things of the kind, however, have been preserved—

and one of them was done just after the conclusion of the business." He then took down a volume of the *English Minstrelsy*, and pointed out to me some lines "On a Violet," which had not at that time been included in Scott's collected works. Lord Kinnedder read them over in his usual impressive, though not quite unaffected, manner, and said, "I remember well that, when I first saw these, I told him they were his best; but he had touched them up afterwards".

The violet in her greenwood bower,  
Where birchen boughs with hazels mingle,  
May boast itself the fairest flower  
In glen or copse or forest dingle.

Though fair her gems of azure hue  
Beneath the dewdrop's weight reclining,  
I've seen an eye of lovelier blue  
More sweet through watery lustre shining.

The summer sun that dew shall dry,  
Ere the sun be past its morrow,  
Nor longer in my false love's eye  
Remained the tear of parting sorrow.

In turning over a volume of MS. papers [continues Lockhart] I have found a copy of verses which, from the hand, Scott had evidently written down within the last ten years of his life. They are headed, "To Time—by a Lady"; but certain *initials* on the back satisfy me that the authoress was no other than the object of his first passion. I think I must be pardoned for transcribing the lines which had dwelt so long on his memory—leaving it to the reader's fancy to picture the mood of mind in which the fingers of a gray-haired man may have traced such a relic of his youthful dreams:

Friend of the wretch oppressed with grief,  
Whose lenient hand, though slow, supplies

The balm that lends to care relief,  
That wipes her tears—that checks her sighs!

'Tis thine the wounded soul to heal,  
That hopeless bleeds from sorrow's smart,  
From stern misfortune's shaft to steal  
The barb that rankles in the heart.

What though with thee the roses fly,  
And jocund youth's gay reign is o'er;  
Though dimm'd the lustre of the eye,  
And hope's vain dreams enchant no more.

Yet in thy train comes soft-eyed peace,  
Indifference with her heart of snow;  
At her cold couch, lo! sorrows cease,  
No thorns beneath her roses grow.

O haste to grant the suppliant's prayer,  
To me thy torpid calm impart;  
Rend from my brow youth's garland fair,  
But take the thorn that's in my heart.

Ah! why do fabling poets tell,  
That thy fleet wings outstrip the wind?  
Why feign thy course of joy the knell,  
And call thy slowest pace unkind?

To me thy tedious feeble pace  
Comes laden with the weight of years;  
With sighs I view morn's blushing face,  
And hail mild evening with my tears.

In regard to these verses Mr. Adam Scott remarks  
(*Sir Walter Scott's First Love*, page 157):

As to the authorship of the verses, Lockhart was probably mistaken. An intimate friend of both parties stated that the lines were great favourites of the lady's,

that she herself had given him a copy of them, and that no doubt her recitation of them had made them known to Scott. Her initials on the back of the copy are capable of explanation in this way.

I share Mr. Scott's doubt as to the accuracy of Lockhart's conjecture, which indeed Lockhart qualifies in the 1839 edition, when he states that perhaps the lines were written by Mrs. Hunter of Norwich—a lady who appears to have written a number of tales for children. But either explanation is curious. These rather morbid lines are suggestive of the mood of Scott rather than of the young lady. At no stage of the story, so far as appears, was her spirit crushed by the final disappointment of a hopeless passion. Moreover, if Scott knew the lines because they had been repeated to him by the lady, and if the lines are expressive of any sentiment of the lady, they suggest a period of intercourse with Scott after all hope of a happy union had been crushed. But the evidence is all against that state of circumstance as ever having obtained. Accordingly, if the poem was a favourite of the lady's, and the lines were repeated by her to Scott so insistently as to linger in his memory for thirty years, her appreciation of them would appear to have been sentimental and impersonal. Their unreality and exaggeration as an expression of Miss Belsches's sentiments will be realised if one tries to picture William Forbes's discovering them whilst looking for a wafer in the desk of his happy young wife!



In a passage quoted in Chapter II., Lockhart (i. 162) refers to "the early and innocent affection to which we owe the tenderest pages not only of *Redgauntlet*, but of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and of *Rokeby*".

Lockhart is probably right in attributing special significance in this relation to these three works.

### THE "LAY"

The *Lay* was the first attempt of Scott to deal otherwise than in a fragmentary way with a romance of love. In his notes to the *Lay* Lockhart states:

It is hardly necessary to say that the choice of hero had been dictated by the poet's affection for the living descendants of the Baron of Cranstoun,<sup>1</sup> and, *now*, none can doubt that he dressed out his Margaret of Brankesome in the form and features of his own first love. The poem may be considered as the consummate flower in which all the dearest dreams of his youthful fancy had at length found expression for their strength, tenderness and beauty.

The "now" in this paragraph is significant. Lockhart does not profess to express any contemporary opinion. Whilst his own experience cannot but have been present to the mind of Scott when he wrote the *Lay*, there were obvious reasons why he should avoid any identification of Mrs. Forbes with the heroine. She was the young wife of his friend: it was gossiped abroad, and must probably have been known to Forbes, that Scott had been an unsuccessful suitor.

<sup>1</sup> George and Jane Cranstoun.

Scott himself was now the loyal husband of an affectionate young wife. Any identifiable description of Mrs. Forbes or of any incident in Scott's relations with her would have been in doubtful taste.

There is no description of Margaret in the *Lay* beyond that she had golden hair and blue eyes. The Minstrel deliberately excuses himself from giving any description of tender love passages, therein adhering to a rule which Scott, with rare exceptions, observed for himself in all his subsequent writings. Love is not so exclusive or so dominant a note in Scott as in most romancists, though of course love is so intertwined with the heroic and the romance that no romancist can dispense with the theme. But Scott eschews descriptions of the tendernesses, the endearments, the innocent familiarities of courtship. Although one must not say "*post hoc, propter ergo hoc*", it is of interest that, in view of the circumstances, there can have been very little of these in Scott's courtship of Miss Belsches. Nor, if one may judge from the correspondence between them, does there appear to have been much of it in his courtship of Miss Carpenter, who addresses him as "Mr. Scott", and subscribes herself "Yours sincerely", even after their engagement.

#### "REDGAUNTLET"

In *Redgauntlet* one is on surer ground than in the *Lay* in the search for the autobiographist. True Scott, as in all cases where he uses a living model, introduces

details which confound those who are in search of an actual portrait. There is, however, no doubt that Fairford is Scott himself and Darsie Latimer his friend William Clerk. But when we come to the lady—Green Mantle—and seek to identify her as Miss Belsches, we are on less sure ground, although this character has been so identified more persistently than has any other of Scott's female characters. This identification, however, seems to rest, not upon recognition of the lady by those who knew her, but on the circumstance that she had inflamed Fairford, who is Scott, and that there was an element of the fortuitous in their first introduction. Save, however, in the circumstance that she has the courage to say grace when challenged to do so, the only colour in the heroine is that of her mantle.

### “ROKEBY”

In *Rokeby* there is perhaps more definite trace of the impression of Scott's first love than in any other of his works. In writing to Miss Edgeworth, the Irish novelist, in 1818, Scott says:

I have not read one of my poems since they were printed, excepting, last year, *The Lady of the Lake*, which I liked better than I expected, but not enough to induce me to go through the rest, so I may truly say with Macbeth,—

I am afraid to think of what I've done.  
Look on't again I dare not.

This much of Matilda (in *Rokeby*) I recollect (*for that is not easily forgotten*) that she was attempted from the existing person of a lady who is now no more; so that I am particularly flattered by your distinguishing it from the others, which are in general mere shadows.

It is generally accepted that the lady whom Scott, as he admits, attempts to portray in *Rokeby* was the lady who was the object of his own first attachment; and who died not long before Scott wrote that poem. Scott's statement that the other heroines were in general mere shadows rather discounts the suggestion that there is much of portraiture in Margaret of the *Lay* or Green Mantle of *Redgauntlet*.

The following is the description of Matilda in *Rokeby*, and it appears to bear distinct points of resemblance both to the portrait of Lady Forbes and to what is known of her disposition.

Wreathed in its dark brown rings, her hair  
 Half hid Matilda's forehead fair,  
 Half hid and half reveal'd to view  
 Her full dark eye of hazel hue.  
 The rose, with faint and feeble streak  
 So slightly tinged the maiden's cheek,  
 That you had said her hue was pale;  
 But if she faced the summer gale,  
 Or spoke, or sung, or quicker moved,  
 Or heard the praise of those she loved,  
 Or when of interest was express'd  
 Aught that waked feeling in her breast,  
 The mantling blood in ready play  
 Rivall'd the blush of rising day.  
 There was a soft and pensive grace,  
 A cast of thought upon her face,

That suited well the forehead high,  
The eyelash dark, and downcast eye.  
The mild expression spoke a mind,  
In duty firm, composed, resigned;—  
'Tis that which Roman art has given,  
To mark their maiden Queen of Heaven.  
In hours of sport, that mood gave way  
To Fancy's bright and frolic play,  
And when the dance, or tale, or song,  
In harmless mirth sped time along,  
Full oft her doting sire would call  
His Maud the merriest of them all.

Matilda's eyes were "hazel". Margaret in the *Lay*, whom Lockhart takes to represent Miss Belsches, had blue eyes. So had the "false love" of the lines upon the Violet written, according to Erskine, very shortly after the rupture: indeed the conceit of these verses turns upon the hue of the eyes. Can it be that Scott introduced the hazel as a definite variation to confound those who professed to find a portrait?

But the relation of *Rokeby* to Scott's first love is not limited to the description of the lady. There is a relationship in the circumstances which admits of no dubiety. Matilda has two lovers, both honourable and worthy and both close friends. If, as is taken, Williamina Belsches sat in Scott's mind for Matilda in *Rokeby*, when Scott gave Matilda two lovers the story of his own relations with the lady cannot but have been present to his mind, and we may therefore look for some suggestion of himself in the picture of one of the lovers, and that probably the unfavoured one.



One does find such suggestions in the description of Wilfred, but it is certainly not an accurate portrait:

Nought of his sire's ungenerous part  
Polluted Wilfred's gentle heart;  
A heart too soft from early life  
To hold with fortune needful strife.  
His sire, while yet a hardier race  
Of numerous sons were Wycliffe's grace,  
On Wilfred set contemptuous brand,  
For feeble heart and forceless hand;  
But a fond mother's care and joy  
Were centred in the sickly boy.  
No touch of childhood's frolic mood  
Show'd the elastic spring of blood;  
Hour after hour he loved to pore  
On Shakespeare's rich and varied lore,  
But turn'd from martial scenes and light,  
From Falstaff's feast and Percy's fight,  
To ponder Jacques's moral strain,  
And muse with Hamlet, wise in vain;  
And weep himself to soft repose  
O'er gentle Desdemona's woes.

In youth he sought not pleasures found  
By youth, in horse, and hawk, and hound,  
But loved the quiet joys that wake  
By lonely stream and silent lake;  
In Deepdale's solitude to lie,  
Where all is cliff and copse and sky;  
To climb Catcastle's dizzy peak,  
Or lone Pendragon's mound to seek.  
Such was his wont; and there his dream  
Soar'd on some wild fantastic theme,  
Of faithful love, or ceaseless spring,  
Till Contemplation's wearied wing  
The enthusiast could no more sustain,  
And sad he sunk to earth again.

Now there are here a number of points of resemblance to Scott so marked that they can hardly have been accidental, and indeed even if they presented themselves to his mind without deliberate purpose of self-representation the coincidences can hardly have escaped him after he had written the passage.

Wilfred was a weakly child, so was Scott. Wilfred had an unsympathetic father. So had Scott in so far as his day-dreams were concerned. Wilfred's mother was sympathetic, so was Scott's. Shakespeare was an early love of both youths. Wilfred was a solitary youth who loved to wander among lonely places, and there amid the wilds of nature to dream fantastic or romantic dreams. During certain periods of his adolescence Scott had a like experience.

So far the descriptions seem to tally, but when we go on to consider other details we find a number which Scott would have repudiated with indignation as applicable to himself. Scott's father was not "ungenerous"; he did not favour other sons and despise Walter; he was fond and proud of Walter. Scott was not soft-hearted, but stout-hearted and manly and even pugnacious when the chance of a scrap occurred. Scott did not "turn from martial scenes" to moral contemplations. He was a poet and a novelist of action, martial glory fascinated him, and he himself has written one of the greatest battle pieces in all literature. Scott did not fail to find pleasure in horses and hawk and hound. He was devoted to horses and dogs and field sports.

So Wilfred is no portrait of Scott. Had Scott really portrayed himself the contrast between the two lovers would not have been so marked and the lady's preference would not have been so easy to understand.

The picture of Redmond, the successful lover, is not so minute or introspective as that of Wilfred. But it is a charming picture of a bold, active, generous youth, manly and modest, and is in complete harmony with the generous expressions used by Scott on many occasions about his successful rival William Forbes. But one can hardly, in the light of other experiences, take it as intended for an accurate portrait.

The following lines in *Rokeby* are perhaps, in view of what we now know of Scott's love story, the passage most suggestive of an actual reminiscence:

She read the tales his taste approved,  
And sung the lays he framed or loved;  
Yet, loath to nurse the fatal flame  
Of hopeless love in friendship's name,  
In kind caprice she oft withdrew  
The favouring glance to friendship due,  
Then grieved to see her victim's pain,  
And gave the dangerous smiles again.

This just suggests what one would imagine of that visit to Fettercairn in April 1796 when, as Scott wrote to Mr. Walker: "You can easily guess that Miss Belsches was recovered and able to see company."

EXPERIENTIA DOCET "HE HIMSELF WAS NOT  
EXEMPT"

The *Lay*, *Redgauntlet*, and *Rokeby* have been specially referred to here because Lockhart singles them out, and if, as is probable, he had no information from Scott himself, he had the opportunity of gathering the impressions of many of the contemporaries of Scott in his younger days. There are passages in others of Scott's works—the *Lady of the Lake*, *Rob Roy*, *Woodstock*, for example—where references to the author's own love tale have been traced. There is this too, as has already been indicated, to carry with one in reading any of Scott's works—when the love theme is handled, viz. the knowledge that the passages were written by one who had loved romantically and intensely. Scott wrote of lovers, of the sentiments and the passions, the hopes and the fears and disappointments of love. He wrote also of war, of battles, the conflict, the tumult, the heroism, the carnage of the field. A novelist may write of battles and battle experiences who, like Scott, was never near a battlefield. In so writing he must rely upon what he has been told or what he may imagine. But if, on the other hand, the novelist is a soldier who has seen hard fighting, his account of the scenes and impressions of combat will doubtless be influenced by his own experience. Even so, Scott, had he never known an intense young passion and had he drifted early into a marriage of convenience, might have

described the conduct and sentiments of passionate young lovers, guided only by the accounts of others and by his own fertile imagination. But Scott, having been himself "through the mill", having had his own intense, anxious, and bitter experiences, there can be no doubt that these experiences guided and influenced him in his creations.

There are passages in Scott which, but for the *Journal*, might suggest that his early love was of the ordinary ardent but evanescent character which marks such an episode in many a life. Men and women suffer on such occasions. But they get over it, become reconciled to it, convince themselves that after all it was for the best, and in after life cheerfully submit to be rallied about it and that, too, even in the presence of their own spouses.

The following passage occurs at the opening of *Peperil of the Peak*:

Ah me! for aught that ever I could read,  
 Could ever hear by tale or history,  
 The course of true love never did run smooth.

The celebrated passage which we have prefixed to this chapter has, like most observations of the same author, its foundation in real experience. The period at which love is formed for the first time, and felt most strongly, is seldom that at which there is much prospect of its being brought to a happy issue. The state of artificial society opposes many complicated obstructions to early marriages: and the chance is very great that such obstacles prove insurmountable. In fine, there are few men who do not look back in secret to some period of their youth at which a sincere and early affection was

repulsed or betrayed, or became abortive from opposing circumstances. It is these little passages of secret history that leave a tinge of romance in every bosom, scarcely permitting us, even in the most busy or the most advanced period of life, to listen with total indifference to a tale of true love.

Again, in *Redgauntlet*, we find, among other sober reflections upon love and marriage, the following:

Let not those, however, who enter into a union for life without these embarrassments (doubt, danger, difficulty, which delight a Darsie Latimer or a Lydia Languish), and which are perhaps necessary to excite an enthusiastic passion in hearts more firm than theirs, augur worse of their future happiness because their own alliance is formed under calmer auspices. Mutual esteem, an intimate knowledge of each other's character, seen, as in their case, undisguised by the mists of too partial passion—a suitable proportion of parties in rank and fortune, in tastes and pursuits—are more frequently found in a marriage of reason than in a union of romantic attachment, where the imagination, which probably created the virtues and accomplishments with which it invested the beloved object, is frequently afterwards employed in magnifying the mortifying consequences of its own delusion, and exasperating all the stings of disappointment.

Scott cannot but have thought of himself when he wrote this passage, though *suo more* he introduces details which do not quite fit.

A number of years later he wrote to a young friend who had made him his confidant in a love affair:

I have said nothing on the delicate confidence you have reposed in me. I have not forgotten that I have



been young and must therefore be sincerely interested in those feelings which the best men entertain with some warmth. At the same time experience makes me alike an enemy to premature marriage and to distant engagements. The first adds to our individual cares the responsibility for the beloved and helpless pledges of our affection, and the last are liable to the most cruel disappointment.

Two years later he writes to the same correspondent:

What you mention of your private feelings on an interesting subject is indeed distressing, but assure yourself that *scarce one person out of twenty marries his first love* and scarce one out of twenty of the remainder has cause to rejoice having done so.<sup>1</sup> What we love in these early days is generally rather a fanciful creation of our own than a reality. We build statues of snow and weep when they melt.

The foregoing passages are calm and sensible and as regards youthful attachments cold. They are far from being suggestive of a lifelong disappointment, a wistful sense of might have been, a heart with a crack in it throughout life.

But against all this are the sorrowful, trembling, pathetic accents of the passages in the Journal referring to Scott's early love. How shall we reconcile the two aspects of the matter?

I am unable to accept the view which has been advanced that this love disappointment blighted

<sup>1</sup> Scott seems to go too far by way of comforting his friend when in effect he suggests that scarce one in four hundred first loves eventuate in a happy marriage.

Scott's life and left him ever afterwards melancholy. Scott no doubt had pensive moods, but he was not a melancholy or unhappy man. Until he was well over fifty and his health began to fail and misfortune to overtake him, he found much zest and enjoyment in life. A melancholy man could not have shed sunshine all around him as Scott did, both in domestic and in social and public life. Thomas Moore, though he wrote "The Harp that once through Tara's Halls", had no taste for melancholy, and he says:

I parted from Scott with the feeling that all the world might admire him in his works, but that those only could learn to love him who had seen him at Abbotsford (viz. in the bosom of his family).

"LIFE'S GLORY DEAD"

In Dr. Matheson's famous hymn there occurs the line:

I lay in dust life's glory dead.

Some people doubtless have done so over a love disappointment, but far more have imagined that they had done so and found out by and by that they were mistaken. I have no doubt that when he was rejected by Miss Belsches, Scott thought that he had laid in dust life's glory dead. But when he wrote the passages just quoted in this chapter he seems to have realised that he had been mistaken. Yet what about the Journal? One may illustrate the matter, I think, by the analogy of another sorrow—domestic be-

reavement. The relations, the circumstances, and the affection of parties, may be such that bereavement does lay life's glory dead—a widowed mother, for example, loses her only child, and however long she may live she carries that sorrow with her to the grave. No day passes but it is present in her mind. But there are other cases of sore trial when in the first hour of sorrow life's glory seems to the sufferer to be laid dead in the dust, and yet time and change of circumstances or new interests operate with healing hands, and the sun begins to shine again. This does not mean that the departed dear one or the agony of the sorrow is forgotten. Even after long years the memory lingers and sometimes it is recalled—aye, and recalled with tears—on the occasion of the handling of some little memento—a note-book, an old photograph, or a faded letter. It comes over one, and one is moved in a manner that those around one who did not even know the deceased and to whom one rarely or never mentions his dear name, cannot realise.

It is in some such way as this that I interpret and reconcile the sequel of Scott's love story. He was crushed, but only temporarily. The agony passed. New interests came into his life. The wound was healed and left no lingering pain. It happens sometimes, however, to those who have been wounded severely in war, that when old age or ill-health overtakes them they feel, or think they feel, a pang in the track of the old wound. So was it with Scott when

premature old age, ill-health, and domestic and financial misfortunes overtook him. There seemed to be a smart in the old wound. It may not perhaps be too kindly a way of putting it, but he was sorry for himself. When the memory of the old anxiety and the old bitter disappointment was recalled, the heart of Walter Scott of 57 was wrung with pity for the bitter sorrow of Walter Scott of 25. The sober wisdom of *Peeveril of the Peak* and *Redgauntlet* was forgotten. It could not be that the agony he endured was common to youth, that this was just like the nineteen out of twenty cases where a first love was disappointed. No. No. His was a peculiar case. One might perhaps outlive such a shock as he had suffered, but one could never be just the same. There must be a crack in his heart. A black cloud had gathered round his young manhood and darkened his vision of life. Doubtless the sun had afterwards broken through that cloud, but as he gazed back upon the far horizon of life the cloud seemed still to linger on the hill-top of his vision. It had not melted like the fleeting breath of the morning mist in the infinite azure of the past.

To sum up these impressions in regard to the influence of his early love upon Scott's after life. As I have already indicated, I am disposed to reject the view that it threw a permanent cloud over that life and made Scott a melancholy man. On the other hand, I accept it that there lingered round the memory of this attachment a vein of tenderness

which was strongly revived in his later years. Finally, Scott's own experience must have coloured his versions of tales of love. Beyond these conclusions it does not seem safe to go. Human character, though doubtless influenced by events and environment, is far too complex and too subtle to permit of any confident deductions as to the operation of any particular incident in moulding it. Without his early disappointment in love Scott might have been a very different man and there might have been no *Waverley Novels*. But without it he might have been the same man undistinguishable from the Scott of the blighted attachment and the *Waverley Novels*. One cannot tell, and it seems vain to speculate. But this one may in confidence affirm, that whether or not this early experience saddened Scott, it did not sour him or abate the sweetness of his nature and the infinite loving-kindness of his heart.

Miss Erskine's marriage to Mr. Campbell of Clathick, as has been seen, was coincident with the final dispelling of Scott's young day-dream. The first child of this marriage was a girl who died in infancy. Caroline Oliphant (afterwards Lady Nairne), touched with the news of her friend's loss, wrote "The Land o' the Leal" and sent it to the mourning mother. In one of his Midlothian speeches Mr. Gladstone, doubtless with some hazy recollection of the song, referred to Scotland as "The Land o' the Leal". But be "The Land o' the Leal" where it may, it is the land of Sir Walter Scott.



## APPENDIX I

### THE BELSCHES FAMILY

THE following is the record in the Register of the Lyon Office of the arms which Sir John Belsches matriculated in 1778 upon the death of his grand-uncle, Sir William Stuart, in 1777:

Sir John Belsches Wishart, Baronet, heir male and representative of the ancient family of Belsches of that Ilk of the Name and lineal Representative of Sir George Wisheart of Clifton Hall, Baronet (heir male of the ancient family of Pitarrow, great grandson of Sir John Wisheart of Pitarrow by Lady Jean Douglas, fourth daughter of William ninth Earl of Angus, which Sir John was tenth in descent from John Wisheart of Convetth in the County of Kincardine, whose second son was William Wisheart, Archbishop of St. Andrews and Lord Chancellor of Scotland), by his mother's mother, Mary, daughter of Daniel Stuart, Esquire, one of the Commissioners for the Treaty of Union (second son of Sir Archibald Stuart of Castlemilk, Bart.), and Margaret, daughter of the said Sir George Wisheart who was created a Baronet by Patent dated the 17th of June 1706 in consequence of a Royal Warrant from King William of date the 19th of April 1700, with destination "in eundem—Georgium Wisheart ejusque haeredes masculos de suo corpore quibus deficientibus haeredes quos-



cunq' eorumque haeredes masculos in perpetuum"—which Sir John is eldest son and heir of William Belsches, Esquire, by Amelia, eldest daughter of John Belsches of Invermay, Esquire, which William was son and heir of John Belsches of Tofts, Esquire, by Janet, third daughter of Alexander Swinton of Mersington, Esquire, one of the Senators of the College of Justice, second son of Sir Alexander Swinton of that Ilk, which last John was son and heir of John Belsches of Tofts, Esquire, by Anne, daughter of David Aiton of Balquhummery, Esquire, a younger son of the family of Aiton, which last John was son and heir of John Belsches of Tofts, Esquire, by Janet, daughter of Sir Thomas Craig of Riccarton, Advocate, which last John was a younger son of the family of Belsches of that Ilk, descended from the family of Ralph de Belasyse of Belasyse in the County of Durham, whose daughter and heiress, Elgiva, was married to Newland, ancestor of the Earl of Fauconberg, son and heir of Belasius, a Norman who was a Commander under King William the Conqueror of England. Bears Quarterly First and Fourth Pally of six Or and Gules a chief Vair for Belsches; second Argent, three piles issuing from the chief conjoined in base Gules for Wisheart; third, Or, a bend Gules surmounted of a fess checkie Argent and Azure, in chief a crescent of the last for Stuart. The shield is surrounded with the ribbon of the Order of Baronet of Scotland, with the Badge or Medal of the Order thereto pendent, Crest the trunk of an oak tree eradicated sprouting out branches with leaves proper placed upon a Cap of Dignity, Gules turned up Ermine. Motto above the Crest *Revirescit* and below the Shield *Fulget Virtus Intaminata*. Supporters on the dexter a Buck in his mouth a branch of oak, both proper and on the sinister a Horse Argent furnished Gules. Matriculated 8th May 1778.

It will be observed that the Baronet is here named Belsches Wishart. There was probably some difficulty about the name. On the one hand it is anomalous to sever a baronetcy from a surname. This was a Wishart baronetcy. On the other hand Sir John's mother had just succeeded to the Stuart fortune, and one of the conditions appears to have been the assumption of the name of Stuart. In any case Belsches Wishart was not persevered with. Sir John appears in Edinburgh Directories generally as Belsches, but once at least as Wishart-Belsches. His daughter Williamina was undoubtedly known prior to her marriage as Miss Belsches, not as Miss Wishart or Miss Stuart. Indeed Scott so names her in a letter quoted in Chapter IV. The difficulty as to the name was solved in 1798, when by Royal Licence, Sir John assumed the name of Stuart.

As is pointed out in Chapter I., the assumption of the dignity of a Baronet and its apparent official recognition during the lifetime of his mother, through whom as her heir the right could alone be derived, is hardly intelligible. In ancient times in Scotland the arbitrary or courtesy assumption of dignities by husbands or sons of females entitled to a dignity was not uncommon. But this was the case of an eighteenth-century baronetcy, and even as regards old titles matters had come to be much more strictly regarded.

It will be observed that the destination of the baronetcy is (translated) "to George Wishart and

the heirs male of his body, whom failing his heirs whomsoever and their heirs male in perpetuity”.

This destination has puzzled experts. It is so far explained by the circumstance that when the dignity was granted George Wishart had no son, but he had one daughter, the wife of Daniel Stuart.<sup>1</sup> To have baldly destined a baronetcy in a certain event to a woman might have been startling, so it was wrapped up in “heirs whomsoever”. Sir George left no son, but he had two more daughters by a subsequent marriage. The three daughters were his heirs portioners, but a Scottish dignity which can be held by a woman goes to the eldest daughter. Accordingly the right to assume, or at all events to transmit to her heir male, the baronetcy passed on Sir George’s death to his daughter Margaret, Mrs. Stuart, as his heir whomsoever. That is not doubtful, nor is it doubtful that on her death it passed to her only son, William—the heir male of the heir whomsoever. But on his death in 1777, what then? There were several opinions. One view advocated by the late Mr. R. R. Stoddart, Lyon Clerk Depute, was that the dignity ought to have passed to the Lockharts, the male descendants of Sir George’s second daughter.<sup>2</sup> This view is not, I think, maintainable. The second daughter was not, as regards a dignity, an heir whomsoever, and her son was not the heir male of his aunt, who took

<sup>1</sup> See genealogical table, p. 129.

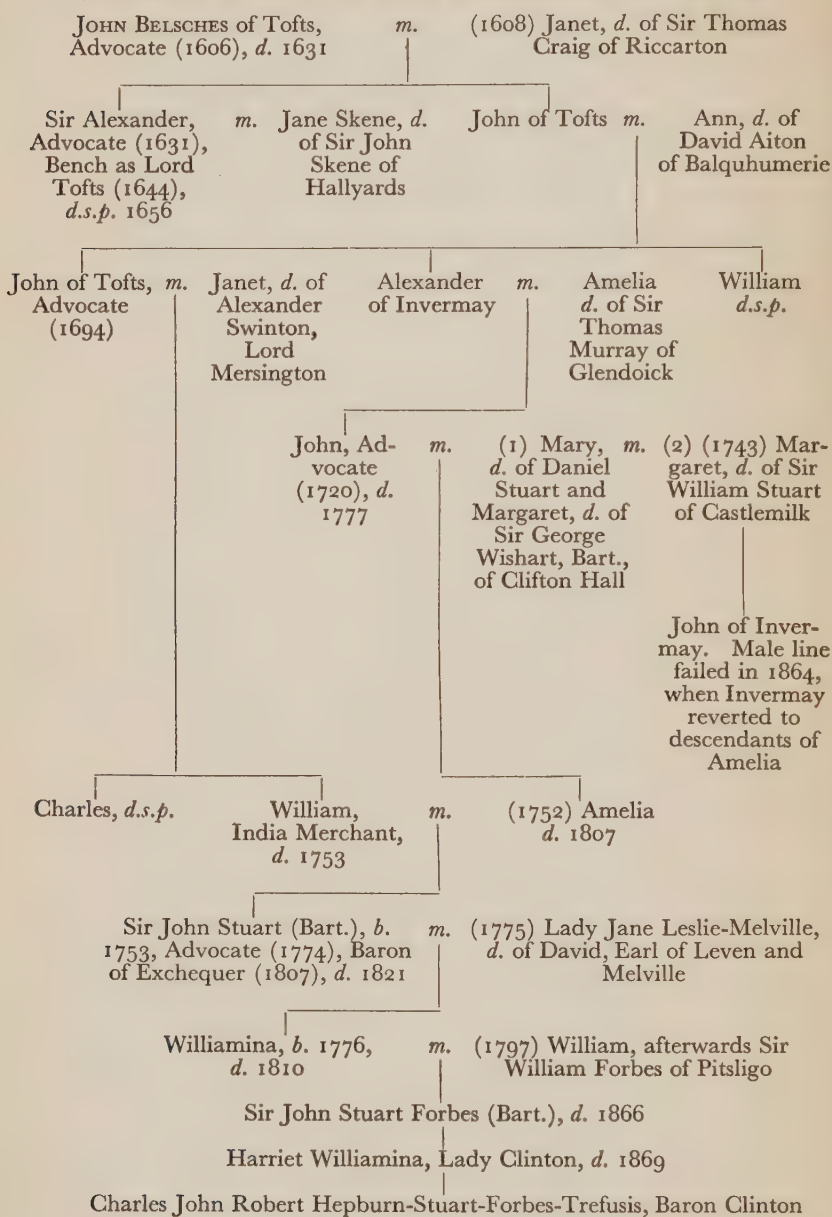
<sup>2</sup> Stoddart argues from presumed intention, assuming erroneously, as it would appear, that the younger daughters were born before the creation of the dignity.

the right as heir whomsoever of her father. Another, and a much more simple and plausible, view is that the eldest daughter, having taken as heir whomsoever, thereafter the destination was put on a normal footing, viz. to her heirs male in perpetuity. On the death of Sir William Stuart in 1777, the heir male of his mother, the heir whomsoever of Sir George Wishart was the male representative of Sir George's male collaterals, and accordingly, acting upon this view, the representative of this right assumed the dignity and purported to hold it for some time after the death of Sir John Stuart. He died, however, without issue, and the claim has not been persevered with by any other branch of the Wishart family.

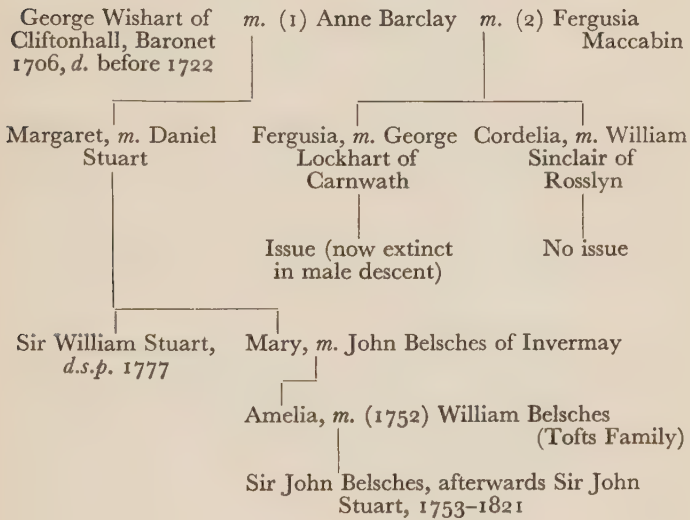
However this may be, there was a third view which prevailed as regards the claim of Sir John Belsches and must be taken to have been officially recognised. According to this view on the failure of male descent recourse must always be had back to the heir whomsoever or heir of line for the time being of the original grantee, irrespective of sex as regards descent. On the death of Sir William Stuart, his niece Mrs. Amelia Belsches was the heir whomsoever of Sir George Wishart, her great-grandfather, and the destination to heirs whomsoever again became operative. It has been pointed out that this is in effect to write out the destination to heirs male of heirs whomsoever. But so it stands.

## APPENDIX II

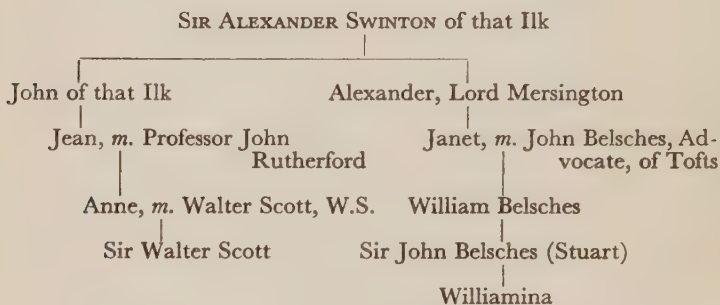
### (1) TABLE SHEWING THE BELSCHES ANCESTRY



(2) TABLE SHEWING ORIGIN AND DESCENT  
OF THE WISHART BELSCHES STUART  
BARONETCY





(3) TABLE SHEWING SCOTT'S KINSHIP WITH  
WILLIAMINA BELSCHES

Accordingly it appears that Scott was a third cousin of Sir John Belsches and a third cousin once removed of Williamina, a very near kinship according to the standard ascribed by Scott himself in his *Romances* to Scottish family sentiment.

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